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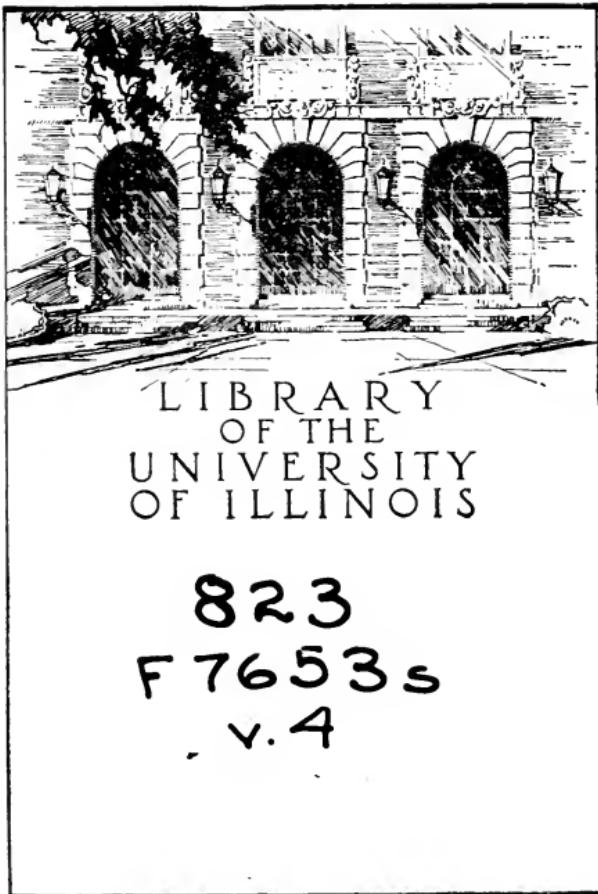
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AUG 3 1978



SIR ROLAND.

A ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.



SIR ROLAND.

A ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY HAL WILLIS,

Student at Law,

AUTHOR OF "CASTLE BAYNARD."

"To the hall! to the hall!
The banquet invites;
There music delights,
And wine crowns with transport the valorous knights."

VOL. IV.

London:

PRINTED FOR A. K. NEWMAN AND CO.

1827.

SIR ROLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE portentous day arrived. The barons and the knights who were summoned to aid and assist the king, with their advice and counsel in the investigation of this momentous affair, which involved the fame and happiness of two of their most dauntless peers and companions in arms, were already assembled.

All passed in silence, and every thing wore the most solemn and imposing aspect; there were among them many staunch partisans of both parties, but they were men of honour, and were sworn

to decide the differences by the evidence adduced, waving all feelings of partiality or friendship.

The ladies were meanwhile alone, and weeping in their chambers. Neither Myriol nor Avis could find solace for their sorrow, in the friendly converse of the other; for the unfortunate quarrel of their lovers had made them, for the first time, experience sentiments the most uncongenial and inimical: for each, in wishing the success of her own lover, of course contemplated the confusion and defeat of his opponent; and both were too good and amiable to rejoice in the prospect of the other's misery.

The hour had come when the cause was to be decided. The king appeared.

The heralds summoned the parties by sound of trumpet: the first blast was answered by the appearance of sir William de Lacy and the baron. The young knight was plainly habited in dark red velvet, without embroidery or ornament, bearing

bearing a plumeless cap, adorned with a small gold buckle, in his hand, while a long ivory-hilted dagger, or basillard, hung on his right side. His fair and handsome face was calm and composed, but the rude buffet of Gervase had somewhat discoloured the right cheek. He bowed gracefully to the king and court, and looked on all the parade and formal preparation with unshrinking firmness.

De Lacy, on the contrary, appeared in all the pomp and glitter his rank entitled him to assume, and he trod the oaken floor of the crowded hall, with all the dignity of a prince, and the cool and imperturbable assurance of a favourite courtier. He saluted all with that winning affability and grace, which being so well studied and so often practised, appeared in him a natural ease and complacency ; and taking a seat fronting the king, he remained silent, sir William resting his arm upon his chair, and standing in a graceful attitude beside him.

Again the trumpets were sounded, and every head was inclined, gazing towards the door to witness the entrance of the bold, light-hearted and gallant sir Roland—but he came not! A pause of five minutes ensued; whispers and expressive looks were given and exchanged. The king became evidently agitated, and impatient of the delay, and half arose several times from his seat. De Lacy kept his eyes fixed earnestly upon him; sir William looked towards the door—there was a sneer upon his countenance, as if in mockery and derision of the appellant's tardiness.

Again, and for the third time, the heralds gave a long loud blast; they paused—the summons was still unanswered! Amazement was visible in every countenance, and the king, unable longer to endure this tantalizing protraction, arose:—“ Go ye, Montalbane!” said he, addressing the chief herald, “ even unto the gates of Montfichet

Montfichet Castle, and command the instant attendance of sir Roland!"

The herald immediately withdrew upon his errand.

" 'Tis strange—'tis wondrous strange!" continued the king; " have any here lately seen or encountered the knight?" —he looked around—" None!"

De Lacy and sir William conferred together in a low inaudible voice.

Those barons and knights who were the partisans of De Lacy, and espoused his cause, murmured at the delay, and took especial care the king should hear their discontented voices; but the sudden re-appearance of the herald silenced them in an instant.

" Well, Montalbane, speak!—comes he?" cried the king, impatiently.

" My liege," replied the breathless messenger, " I have neither had speech with him, nor beheld him. Since yesternight he hath not been seen by lord, knight, or varlet!"

“ Hah !” cried the king, “ say’st thou so ? and learnt ye not whither he went, and upon what errand ?”

“ At eventide,” replied the herald, “ as the sun was going down, he was noticed to pass through Ludgate, accompanied by four of his vassals, all trapped and mounted !”

“ In sooth ! and doth he fly then ?” exclaimed Stephen, stamping angrily with his right foot.

De Lacy rose—he marked his opportunity.—“ My liege,” said he, coolly, “ we rest here in compliance with thy commands, to answer and reply to the calumnious and unfounded charges of the knight, sir Roland. Prepared are we, being guiltless, to undergo the strictest scrutiny of our just and gracious prince, and our honourable peers ! But what he hath uttered in anger, and in spite, he fears now to repeat. He flies even from those he hath calumniated, for he is conscious he cannot substantiate his discourteous allegations.

gations. Even in citing us here, however, he hath put a stigma, a stain, upon our uprightness and our untarnished honour, that the discerning justice of this respected court alone hath power to obliterate."

" Justice shall be done to all, my lord," replied the king; " but let us not judge hastily, lest we repent speedily. Sir Roland yet may arrive, and endeavour to vindicate his angry accusations—founded in error perchance—then will they be readily confuted by truth. Conviction will bring with it the candid confession, and the prayer of pardon, that may move the generosity of the defendants to forgive the offences of the appellant. And, if he come not, then shall they be held by all as guiltless and aggrieved."

" He will not, dare not come," said De Lacy; " by Heaven! I did presage this: and shall we, my liege," continued he, warmly, " endure this treatment in silence? Shall this arrant knight play with our honour, as if 'twere but a bauble to be

sported with? we who have followed and served thee in fair and adverse fortune, and fought and bled in thy right and lawful cause; is this to be borne?—nay, let these heralds proclaim him to the four quarters of the world—‘A false knight, and an outlaw!’

A murmur of applause and approbation ran through the assembly, who appeared to be unanimous in censuring the absent knight, won by the earnest appeal of the baron, who seemed to speak under the influence of feelings most deeply wounded. As brothers in arms, they sympathized with him and his valiant son. In the battle-field they had never found them wanting; and even those who had come to support sir Roland, began to waver when they found he did not appear—their suspicions were aroused, and they were gradually inclined to regard the baron and his son as the injured party.

But the baron’s speech demanded a reply, and Stephen, in mingled astonishment and

and anger at the unaccountable and suspicious conduct of sir Roland, arose and gave utterance to his feelings.—“ My lord, thee and thy brave son shall have ample justice; but vile and reprehensible as the conduct of this young knight may appear, to him likewise shall impartial justice award a patient hearing. If in two hours hence we receive no intimation from him of his intentions, then will we willingly subscribe to every thing this most vexatious cause may justify. Let it be proclaimed throughout the city, that in two hours, if the appellant, sir Roland, be not forthcoming, his name shall be branded by infamy, and he be held base, and outlawed !”

A sudden commotion among the soldiers and vassals that thronged about the entrance of the hall, at the conclusion of the king’s speech, caused every eye to turn inquiringly in that direction. It was Ralphe, the faithful Ralphe. He rushed past the guards, and prostrated

himself before the king. Big drops of perspiration coursed down his pale and agitated countenance. A fearful tremor pervaded his whole frame, and his words seemed struggling for utterance.

“ Speak, knave! where—where is thy master?” demanded the king. “ Doth he hie hither, to snatch his name from infamy?”

“ Most gracious king,” said the imploring Ralphe, “ I have heard the sentence your royal speech hath doomed,” and the tears gushed involuntarily from his eyes. “ Oh, recal those cruel words—they are undeserved, indeed they are. He is no traitor, but more true and loyal than many who loudly vaunt their faith and allegiance to your grace. But he is betrayed—he is played falsely with; some black and horrible conspiracy hath deprived him of his liberty—nay, perhaps his life, or, by my father’s soul! he would now have been here to prove himself a true knight and loyal, to the confusion of his enemies. Appearances are dark against him,

him, but if it so please your grace only to remember what he has been, with what fidelity he hath served your grace, you will justly deem his present conduct foreign to his nature. His speech was never bolder than his actions, and he was ever ready to back his assertions by his good sword."

"But what can possibly withhold him now?" said Stephen, who was evidently inclined to listen favourably to the earnest appeal of sir Roland's faithful squire. "Where lies he hid? or by whom restrained?"

"Heaven and his enemies do only know!" answered the squire; "but, an my poor life be worthy to be staked against the honour and worth of so valiant a knight, I would willingly offer myself a hostage for his truth, the which Heaven in its goodness may speedily prove, to the destruction and overthrow of his malignant persecutors!"

"We accept thee, knave!" said the

king ; “ and say not so our good barons, and our brave knights too ? ” added he, addressing the assembly.

For a few minutes this demand was unanswered ; there was evidently a difference of opinion among them : at last one of them, a young baron, of little wealth or fame, a well-known partisan of De Lacy, replied—“ We think, my liege, this will be but justice to sir Roland ; but we must not forget, in our ardour to serve that knight, that he is the appellant in this cause, and that one of the chiefest and noblest barons of your grace’s realms, and as brave a knight, suffer both pain and trouble, for their noble breasts being filled with the nicest honour, are grievously burdened by sir Roland’s imputations, although he come not hither to prove them. It is therefore meet that in granting such licence to the absent knight, we also propose a limited number of days for his forthcoming.”

“ Let it be forty days,” said Stephen.

The

The assembly, as well as De Lacy and his son, cheerfully acquiesced in this arrangement.

“ And if he come not then,” continued the king, “ his lands, and wealth, and all that he possesseth, shall be confiscated, and given unto the baron De Lacy and sir William, as a compensation for the temporary odium he hath cast upon their characters. But I trust the cause, whatever it may be that now withholds him, will be removed, and he may yet appear to retrieve his fame, and every thing be amicably arranged, as well I wot our good De Lacy wishes heartily. So go thou forth, esquire, and having heard our decree, gather together thy master’s vassals, and straightway seek out the knight, and bid him hither; and as he renders good or bad account, so may he hope for our consideration.”

Ralphe breathed his grateful thanks; and quitting the hall, lost no time in assembling sir Roland’s vassals, who, to the number

number of fifty, were sojourning in London, and were, to a man, all eager to set forth in search of their kind, brave leader. Many others too volunteered their services in aid of the squire's laudable object; and he set forward, buoyed up by the most encouraging hope, and the happy prospect of success crowning his exertions.

CHAPTER II.

“ HAIL to thee, sweet Matilda ! queen of my heart, and soother of my cares !” cried Stephen, as his consort, in answer to his summons to attend him, hastily entered his chamber, where he was reclining upon his couch, by no means amused by the varying reflections upon the mysterious events of the past day ; “ thou comest like a gentle balm to cure all mental wounds and maladies of the disturbed brain ! Come hither, and let thy kind caresses dissipate the gloom that hangs about me—bid memory cease to torment me, and let my thoughts be full of thee !”

The young and beautiful Matilda seated herself beside him ; and laying her round white arm fondly upon his shoulder, her fair countenance brightening, and glowing with

with an expression of the purest affection —“ So Heaven be praised,” said she, “ that grants me the power of solacing thy woe, and smoothing thy care-full brow! ’Tis woman’s province and her greatest bliss to cheer the drooping heart, and bid the heavy pulse of melancholy beat in lighter and quicker vibrations; and blessed am I in being capable of blessing one whom I love so well.”

Stephen imprinted a kiss upon her forehead.—“ Be thou ever loyal and true,” said he, “ and the world’s frowns or cares shall be despised and forgotten; in thee I’ll find a better world—regarding thy affection as a heaven above it, thou loved and loving subject!”

“ Thy subject,” said Matilda, “ and therefore not subject to sorrow, being thy subject; for therein is my gladness in serving so good a king, on whom may joyfulness ever attend adequate to his worth!”

“ Gramercy, fair queen!” replied Stephen, embracing her, but his mind again involuntarily

involuntarily recurred to the subject of the afternoon's discussion. "Oh! but this hath been a grievous day for me, Matilda. By my halidome, I would have fought in harness for three whole days, less worn down in spirit than these few hours of cavilling and suspense have brought upon me! It frets my very soul to see the hasty passions and divisions this cause hath given birth to. Yea, this matter, begotten upon a few hot words, weighs upon us like a mountain, and yet is not more tangible than the breath from whence it sprang."

"But all will soon be well again, I trust, my liege," said Matilda.—"What think ye, sir?"

"That all will not be well again. If sir Roland return, I may risk the friendship and sage counsel of the all-accomplished De Lacy, and the able services of sir William, whose love hath, of the sudden, most surprisingly turned to bitterest hate, against

against the youth they once bepraised in most unmeasured terms!"

"Wherefore this? Bethink ye, my liege, the knight be culpable or unfortunate?"

"I scarcely know; my mind, even on that important point, is undetermined. I gave him credit for his truth and loyalty; but I have of late experienced such strange fickleness in men, whom I vainly thought no wind could veer, that I will trust no more. What faith shall I fix upon another's firmness, when I find even a kinsman's honesty is to be shaken? Our loyalest subjects, those who serve us with the most untiring zeal, are those that, by so doing, can best serve themselves. Duty, gratitude, and love, are all swallowed up by the monster of selfishness. Interest sways all men—the greater, the worse they be; for the evil groweth, feeding upon its own desires accomplished, yet still insatiate, till eke the world's extent is too limited for its capacity."

"Nay,

“ Nay, let us hope there still remains some honesty in the world—Virtue, for virtue’s sake—valour, for valour’s meed—a glorious fame; and few though they be, my liege, rallying around our standard, they will prove a host,” said Matilda.

“ Well, well, love, I will rail no more ’gainst men, lest in the practice I become a cynic, and open indiscriminately upon good or bad; yet if the world mend not, I shall distrust myself, and think I dwell in a world of mocking shadows and false delusions.”

Matilda saw his humour, and the rather endeavoured to calm his ruffled temper by her soothing, sympathizing speech, and gentle caresses, than by open opposition to augment his petulance; and she happily succeeded in tranquillizing his troubled mind.

As for De Lacy, the primary source of all these difficulties, yet apprehending no danger of discovery, he experienced no other feeling than joy at the success of his stratagems,

stratagems, and the consequent honourable manner in which he and his son had been acquitted by their peers, and the censure which had been passed upon the luckless sir Roland for his involuntary absence, which, as may be readily divined, was solely effected by the agency of De Lacy's minions, who, even before his appearance at the assembly, was well assured of sir Roland's incapability of confronting him ; he laughed in scorn at the gracious license of forty days, which the king, the barons, and the knights, had so unanimously granted the knight for his appearance.

But it was neither the prospect of succeeding to the lands and estates of sir Roland, or the pleasure of having rid himself of a sharer in the king's favour, blasting his fair fame with the imputation of falsehood and cowardice, that caused the baron such unbounded exultation ; he fore-saw, in the removal of sir Roland, that he should have every opportunity of ingratiating

gratiating himself in the favour of Myriol, and fanning the spark of esteem which he imagined she entertained for him, into the warm and glowing flame of love. He thought—he was conscious indeed, that she felt a tenderer sentiment than mere friendship or esteem for sir Roland; but in the absence of this formidable rival, he believed every obstacle in the way of the fulfilment of his wildest wishes was removed; for although he loved Myriol with the most ardent passion, he yet regarded her as a woman, and weak and fickle as those he had known to yield so readily to his flattery and his blandishments, and therefore calculated upon an easy conquest, the more especially when his suit should be backed by parental authority, which he intended immediately to call in to his aid, in nowise fearing that sir Reginald de Travers would hesitate for a moment to sanction his addresses, but on the contrary, expecting that he would be highly delighted by the prospect

pect of such a noble and distinguished alliance.

Indulging in these airy speculations, to which hope, pride, vanity, and love, all combined to give a colouring of probability, and to promise a happy realization, De Lacy stood fixed as a statue, gazing upon the pale moon, and marking the fast flying clouds, that rushed rapidly, and in stormy haste, across her disk, now concealing, and now revealing her brightness, only to be seen and hidden, and veiled again, throwing a varying light and shade through the large Gothic window of his chamber, whereat, with arms infolded, and won from sleep by the pleasant meditations that filled his brain, the baron stood, careless of the lateness of the hour, when all within the castle but the watch and ward were buried in sleep.

In the still, tranquil hour of night, the ear seems more watchful, the sense of hearing more delicately fine, and the slightest noise, which, were it twenty times

times as loud, would not be marked when all the world is stirring, is then audible ; and so the placid silence which De Lacy enjoyed was, on the sudden, startled and broken by the rustling sound of some slow and cautious tread upon the rushes which were strewed upon the chamber-floor. The baron turned aside his head, and looked, without stirring from the deep recess in which he stood. The noise had ceased, and recollecting that the door was secured, and that no one could possibly intrude upon his privacy without his permission, he smiled at his momentary apprehension, and attributing it entirely to imagination, endeavoured to resume the agreeable train of his reflections ; but, notwithstanding he would fain have persuaded himself that he experienced no fears, and there existed no cause, the delicate thread of his thoughts was snapped in twain, and he found he could no longer pursue his agreeable reveries. On the contrary, he found his spirits suddenly depressed,

depressed, and overcome by the most unpleasant and indefinable sensations. He would willingly have sought his couch, but he still lingered, almost unconsciously, at the window.

There was a lamp burning in the apartment, but the small, dim light it gave, only rendered the place more gloomy. The recess wherein he was standing was about twelve feet deep and six wide, and consequently one half the chamber was concealed from his observation by the position he occupied, and which by no means could he prevail upon himself to quit, such an effect had the dreary hour, the place, and a trifling circumstance, upon his startled imagination.

A passing cloud suddenly eclipsed the moon, and left him in comparative darkness; again the rustling sounds became more distinctly audible, and evidently nearer. He listened, and scarcely breathed for a minute—it was a minute of painful suspense; the sound had ceased again, and

and he breathed. A sigh heaved his breast, and his ear caught the echo, in a deeper, long-drawn sigh. He turned round—the gray light of the moon burst at the same moment through the window in a flood, rendering every object indistinctly visible, and his wondering eyes beheld the tall erect figure of a man, standing at the entrance of the recess. The baron's heart, faint with apprehension, died within him, his tongue refused its office, and he felt as if all his senses were concentrated in that of vision.

The spectre gazed on him unmoved, and in appalling silence; but as his pale visage became more distinct in the growing light, the baron beheld with horror the well-known features and form of his ambitious minion, Nicol Arnot, whom his own fears had commanded to be sacrificed.

De Lacy was compelled to support his trembling frame against the wall; he dared not take his eyes from the object of

his terror, whose gaze, like that of a basilisk, transfixed him to the spot. In agony of fear he at last faltered out—“ Who? what art thou? what would ye?”

“ Vengeance!”

“ Who shall avenge thee?”

“ Justice!”

“ Would’st thou have justice of me?”

“ From thee? there is no justice in thee; but I will have justice on thee, ay, and suddenly! De Lacy, the hour draws nigh when thou shalt prove how little thy wealth or overgrown power can shield thee! Thy fame shall be blighted, and thy fortunes blasted! The hour of retribution is at hand. The glory of the proud and wicked De Lacy, the fratricide and the usurper, shall be shorn, and he shall fall as the tree, stricken and withered by the avenging lightning of heaven!”

“ Spirit of evil! demon! sprite! or whate’er thou art that dost assume the lineaments and bearing of Arnot!” said De Lacy, in a hoarse low voice, that fear had

had robbed of its ordinary commanding and dignified tone, “ hence, and no longer mock my sight, or pour into mine ears thine accursed denunciations ! By the holy name of St. Gervase and St. Bride, I bid thee, damned spirit, to sink into the darkness of thy narrow cell !”

As the terrified baron concluded this solemn charge, or exorcism, the moon was again momentarily obscured, and the quick returning light exhibited the space his midnight visitor had filled, vacant and unoccupied.

“ Fled, vanished, waned even in the darkness, the type of its own evil !” soliloquized De Lacy, gradually recovering his scattered senses, as he became assured of the spirit’s absence. “ What bodes this visit? good or evil? Can there issue truth out of wickedness? No, no, my senses can give no credence to this warning. What have I seen, or heard, or spoken to? perchance I have dreamed—but yet that voice, that look, those cold,

cold freezing words, that chilled the current of my heart, are still echoing in my brain, and memory repeats them still with cruel accuracy. I dare not sleep—I cannot! I'll rest here till dawn brings with it some kind assurance of reality. Oh, pale-faced moon! sail quickly on thy course, and bid the glorious sun arise to dissipate this overweening gloom!"

CHAPTER III.
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“ SWEET Avis, thou’rt right. In sooth I’m sad, more sad than sadness may be. My trouble is, that strange eyes may note it—and, noting it, may pity me. To grief like mine, pity gives offence; and that friendly tongue that would fain pour the sweets of consolation into my aching bosom, even that seems to mock my misery. What sorrows I endure are of the heart, and therein would I choose to hide them from all observe, or kind commiseration. Who can divine the pangs I feel? Those only who suffer poignantly, as I do; and they, God knows! have too much need of consolation to throw it away upon others. The happy, the contented, cannot minister to me, for they cannot know my malady, and their goodness would only run

the risk of being infected with my sadness, while all their bright and glowing cheerfulness would be wasted on my gloom, being but as the meteors that blaze, and sparkle, and shoot along the heavens, and are lost in the darkness of night." So answered the lovely Myriol to her amiable and sympathizing companion and confidante, Avis.

"Thy lover is not dead," said she.

"Better death than infamy and dis-  
honour," replied Myriol.

"Who dare brand him with either?" said Avis.

"None dare openly, but there are those  
would do it willingly. Oh, Avis! he  
hath enemies that have deeply wronged  
him. They have aspersed his fame, being  
envious of it, but an' they pluck the lau-  
rels from his brow by means so vile and  
sinister (they grow not greater by such  
little arts), they only wear them with  
the poison their own viperous tongues  
have cast upon them!"

"Beseech

“ Beseech ye, Myriol,” said Avis, “ hold not my courteous lover, for my sake, culpable. He was sir Roland’s friend: the baron too loved him, and regarded his growing fame with a pride truly paternal. Was not his tongue ever the loudest in the young knight’s praise ?”

“ True—true,” said Myriol, sorrowfully, “ but all they have spoken, in such high-sounding and true-seeming words, is all unsaid in this one action.”

“ Alack ! would that this difference ne’er had been ! they had still been undivided friends, and we most happy: but forget not,” added Avis, wishing, as far as possible, to exculpate her own loved knight, “ that sir Roland was the appellant in this cause. *They* came to answer *his* summons !”

“ So would I wage my life, Avis,” replied Myriol, warmly, “ that they did give him cause for such a suit, or else had he not arraigned them.”

“ Thou art wounded, Myriol, and there-

fore irritable," replied Avis: " I would not press upon thee harshly, but for love and justice, till I prove him wrong, I'll hold my lover right. If sir Roland were wronged, how chanced it that he came not to approve it?"

Myriol sighed deeply, and the tears filled her fair blue eyes, as she answered in a voice tremulous with emotion—" Therein is my wonder and my grief. It is an inscrutable mystery. Time alone may speak how true are the suspicions of his enemies. But those that know and love him, Avis, know that fear is a stranger to sir Roland's manly heart, where all that's just, generous, and good inhabits, tainted by no evil passion. Think'st thou if I did suspect him unjust or dis honourable, that even my affection could render me blind or partial to his faults? No—no, I would weep for sorrow that I had misplaced my heart, and wash out his remembrance with my bitter tears. I would think on him no more; his name

—his

—his very name should be forgotten, or, recurring, should only be construed by mine ear—‘ Deceit! duplicity! I would, for his sake, discredit all men; and the more good they seemed, avoid them more, distrusting their best appearances, being once deceived; and, in forgetting him, I would not care to forget myself, and all the world beside: but still may this never be! nay, it cannot, or I would rather encounter death than meet that cruel day that should bring me the tidings of his unworthiness. Avis, he is good; he is unchanged; my heart wishes, and reason tells me it must be so.”

“ Well—well,” answered Avis, kindly, “ we will waive further argument upon this topic, which can bring neither joy nor gladness to either of us. Both parties have been rash, but neither guilty.”

“ Pray Heaven it prove thus!” ejaculated Myriol; but there was a doubt even in the sad sigh that followed this prayer. She could not regard the De Lacs in

any other light than enemies to her injured and calumniated knight, and therefore indirectly to herself; and she deemed her lively friend unfortunate in being blind to the imperfections of sir William, and loving one so well who was so little worth; yet even to her, her trusty confidante, she dared not utter all she thought of De Lacy's conduct, fearing to wound her sensibility, by her strictures upon the virulence of their proceedings. She dared not whisper her dreadful suspicions of the cause of sir Roland's disappearance to her attentive ear; she almost feared to listen herself to the horrible suggestions of her foreboding heart.

Avis witnessed her trouble, and mingled tears of sympathy with her tears of sorrow. She pitied her friend, but she loved her knight too well to think there was aught of injustice in his conduct; and it is by no means to be wondered at that such a simple, single-hearted, and confiding girl should be deluded by an exterior

so plausibly correct, untarnished by the slightest breath of detraction, and which even deceived the penetration of more worldly eyes. At the same time, however, that she held sir William guiltless of any dishonourable intentions towards his friend, she regarded the whole affair as a circumstance arising entirely out of the rashness and imprudent heat of sir Roland, and which hereafter might be amicably arranged, without loss of fame or honour to either party. But still the knight's absence created some unanswerable objections to the justness of his cause, that her esteem for his virtues would fain have suppressed.

During the conference of these two beauteous damsels, sir William de Lacy made his appearance. With all his accustomed ease and elegance, he saluted his lady-love and her fair companion; but Myriol met his gay address with a coldness and reserve that caused the blood to tinge his brow with confusion. It was

the first time since the day of the assembly that he had encountered her, from the very good reason that she had sedulously avoided him; and the assumption of so much pretended levity and light-heartedness, it was obvious to Myriol, was only a disguise of his real feelings, which could have been by no means enviable upon meeting so unexpectedly, and so unwished for, with the mistress of his much-injured friend ; for he was not yet sufficiently practised in the cunning art of duplicity, or so deeply versed in infamy, to be wholly callous to the upbraidings of his conscience. He read in the tear-bedimmed eyes of the lovely Myriol that her heart was sorrowful, and his own momentarily pained him for being the cause of grief to one so passing fair and virtuous. In vain he endeavoured to force the conversation; his wit and his vivacity were chilled by her indifference, and there was contempt and reproof in her proud and scornful look, as making a low and

and formal courtesy, she replied in answer to his query if she were ill?—

“ Not so well but that I would be better; yet 'twere better to be passing well than ill, though there are many of us that would do well to be much better.”

“ Howsoever that may be, I would do my best to learn the means, sweet Myriol.”

“ Let every man examine his heart—his passing thoughts, and his past deeds, and if there exist aught of evil therein, he will do well to reject that boldly, and become the better; but it were best done quickly. Evil neglected, groweth apace, while good declineth.”

“ And who that hath sense of goodness,” said sir William, “ would decline good coming in so fair a form? To breathe in the atmosphere of such worth, is to be worthier.—Nay, stay—haste not from us, I pray thee, sweet Myriol. Hither, and let us do our best to chase away the gloom that overhangs thy brow.”

But his voice had more power to quicken

en than arrest her steps, and she vanished from the apartment without deigning to exchange another word with the man she suspected of duplicity and deceit towards her loved knight, and whom she could not consequently regard with any other feelings than contempt and apprehension.

“Avis, follow, and persuade thy friend.”

“No, no,” said Avis, “leave her to herself awhile; she may recover from this sad depression that weigheth down her buoyant spirits.”

“Strange girl!” said sir William—“what could have worked this sudden change; we never met, nor parted thus before;” yet was he secretly rejoiced that she had withdrawn, for he could not well have endured her reproof, or spoken of the fortunes of sir Roland, with any degree of calmness or composure.

“Alack!” sighed Avis, “she rather claims thy pity than thy anger. The cause of her sorrow can be no secret. But let us not talk of this, lest we likewise lose the

the little cheerfulness our sad friends have left us."

"So my loved Avis change not," said sir William, affectionately, "all the world will still be beautiful and unchanged to me; I will bear patiently the vicissitudes of fate, and mourn not the loss of wealth or friends, being still rich in thy regard and enviable love."

Such were the fond and disinterested sentiments ever on the lips of the fascinating and agreeable sir William de Lacy, and all fears and suspicions were lulled by the sweet music of his voice; and the beautiful Avis dwelt upon his words with all the confiding love and affection of an artless girl, nothing doubting but that the knight was as good and virtuous as he was handsome and eloquent.

Alas! if the maiden could have read the secret and hidden sentiments of that heart she deemed so noble, and found how little the portion she shared with the pride, ambition, and envy that were there, she would

would have shrunk with horror from the black deformity, and forgotten, or died for the venial error of yielding her affections to one so seeming fair, and yet so detestable. But she was happy in her ignorance, and by her blindness to his faults, was spared a world of pain, that would else have inevitably bowed down her gentle spirit to the dust. As for Myriol's condemnation of his conduct, as likewise the baron's, she only considered it as the natural consequences of the bitterness of her sorrow, and the overflowings of her grief at the temporary odium cast, by their proceedings, upon the character of sir Roland, and she forgave it on the score of love, that passion pleading much for her friend in the sympathizing bosom of Avis.

Sir William was perfectly conscious of the sway he held over her affections, and took especial care to turn her favour to his own advantage, artfully instilling into her mind the most unfavourable prejudices against sir Roland, which he was fully

fully aware would be remembered and repeated to the queen, upon every occasion where that knight's merits and his own were the subject of discussion.

At the same time, this was effected in such a cunning, indirect manner, that sir William always appeared rather to divulge sir Roland's errors unconsciously, or if otherwise, only with a laudable endeavour to exculpate and not condemn him, thereby playing the amiable at the cost of the knight's reputation.

CHAPTER IV.  
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TWENTY days, being the one-half of the time limited for the re-appearance of the unfortunate sir Roland, had already run out, without bringing forth any tidings of his fate or destination, except the idle rumours industriously circulated by De Lacy and his partisans, the malicious purport of which was, that the young knight had traitorously seceded from his allegiance to king Stephen, and even yielded up all the benefits he had munificently bestowed upon him, and under an assumed name and title, entered some foreign service, or secretly joined in the cabals of Maude's adherents, being partly won over to her interests by a large bribe and noble promises, and partly by a penchant for the empress, which, it was calumniously

luminously bruited, was by no means disagreeable to that high-born dame.

Stephen had been so often deceived by the duplicity of those whom he had served, that notwithstanding the partiality he bore towards the knight, he could scarcely discredit these wild and unfounded speculations. With the queen, however, he was still in favour, and maugre the insinuations of De Lacy and his son to poison her mind, she could not be brought to regard him in any other light than unfortunate; and openly professed her firm conviction that he would again appear, and publicly assert his innocence of all the crimes, and faults, and follies, imputed to him.

But the baron considered he had already awaited his appearance, which he knew would never happen, a sufficient time, and began to bethink him of putting his designs against Myriol into immediate execution. Indeed, so strong was his singular passion for this lovely and accomplished

plished damsel, that every hour was an age in the calculation of his ardent desire to become the possessor of such a treasure. Having in his own mind marked out the exact course he should pursue to bring about his wishes, he dispatched a servitor to the mansion of sir Reginald de Travers, politely intimating that he should do him the honour of visiting him, appointing the day and hour. So much condescension from so great a man, naturally called forth the most heartfelt welcome from the happy and blunt old veteran, who forthwith prepared to receive him with all due honour and respect.

The important day arrived, and with it brought the gay and noble, though somewhat ancient, suitor to the portals of the free and hospitable De Travers.

“ Thrice welcome, baron de Lacy !” said sir Reginald, uncovering his grey and flowing locks, in respect to his noble visitor. “ And though our domicile be neither a palace nor a paradise, in sooth thou shalt

shalt be entertained of our best—the which, though humble, is freely offered, and the better for thy company."

"Gramercy!" cried De Lacy, doffing his cap, and with a jovial and familiar air, which accorded well with the blunt and honest humour of his host—"with the like cordial welcome, an I make me not merry, call me a churl. By our lady, sir knight! we have served too many campaigns in our days, to stand upon too nice punctilios. Let us leave ceremony to prim dames and their frank esquires; we can better employ our time than in the observance of these formalities."

Sir Reginald grasped the baron's proffered hand and pressed it warmly, while De Lacy, with the most conciliating affability, put his arm within the old knight's, and entered the hall, from whence they were conducted by the major-domo, and followed by some dozen well-attired varlets, to a small and elegant chamber, where the board was spread in the first style

style of the then prevailing mode; and though solely for the entertainment of De Lacy and his host, there was wherewithal to feast a dozen of our modern aldermen, those gormandizing gentry who are so scandalized for their singular voracity.

The embossed gold and silver covers, dishes, chalices, and flagons, were of the most costly workmanship; and the smoking viands, and the rich racy wines therein contained, were of the best that the city of London (the mart for all luxuries) could boast.

“ I would fain have bidden others to the feast, that would have better entertained your lordship than I, your honoured host, am able,” said sir Reginald; “ but I have only acquiesced in this particular to your request, to be entirely alone.”

“ And for this I owe thee, sir knight, my cordial thanks,” replied De Lacy, “ for I have business of private import, that doth pertain unto our particular interests alone

alone—an affair of moment to myself, and, peradventure, no less to thee."

"Then let us e'en fall to," said sir Reginald; "for I hold a hearty meal and a cup of good wine the very best introduction to business that can be; it openeth the heart to conviction, maketh it soft and yielding as wax to hard arguments, and thereby promoteth good humour and good fellowship."

"Ha, ha, ha! Right well argued, by St. Anthony!" cried De Lacy; "and now, by this hand, sir Reginald, I do esteem thee a most true subject and loyal, of our well-beloved prince, even by token of thy lusty commendation of good fare—for he that lives well, must needs be a good subject."

"In sooth, sir baron, I would be thought so—being truly and honestly so—not otherwise," said sir Reginald; "and, moreover, I would live well with all men."

"At least ye have a care that all men shall live well with thee," replied De Lacy,

Lacy, pointing to the board. “ But a good appetite at a feast is better praise to the host than a host of fine words ; so I’ll e’en commend thine abundance, sir knight, by falling to.”

Hereupon they took their seats. The liveried varlets arranged themselves in precise order—the covers were raised, and the two veterans commenced in good earnest to do justice to the fare.

With much zeal and silence, interrupted only by a few concise remarks, and those only put forth in praise of the excellence, the *gout*, and the flavour of the different viands, they dispatched three ample courses ; and now their palates being abundantly gratified, two minstrels tuned their lays to the gratification of their ears, while the old warriors conversed merrily on many a battle past, wherein they had won never-fading laurels, and many honourable scars, quaffing cool exhilarating wines to the memory of friends and days gone by.

Never

Never were the winning manners—the suavity—the lively conversation of De Lacy, exhibited or exerted so successfully.

As the camelion is fabled to take the hue and complexion of every thing where-with it comes in contact, even as adroitly could De Lacy reflect the humour of those with whom he associated; and so admirably did he suit himself to the undisguised eccentricities and harmless foibles of his host, that he completely won the old knight's heart, who wondered, with the most genuine simplicity, that he could ever have mistaken a bluff honest-hearted old soldier (as De Lacy now appeared to be) for a smooth-tongued formal courtier; it was a most agreeable disappointment, and he sincerely believed that the baron's enemies had vilely misrepresented him: and lastly, to crown all, De Lacy touched a chord in the old warrior's heart, which vibrated with the warmest, truest, and tenderest affection, by rising and proposing “ Myriol, the most chaste and virtuous of

demoiselles! a phœnix of beauty, eke among the fairest, but loved still more for her virtues than her charms! The loadstar of gallantry—the shrine whereat the noblest hearts were proud to bend the suppliant knee! Thrice happy father, to possess so fair a daughter! and thrice happy child in owning so brave a sire!"

Sir Reginald grasped the baron's hand, and, with evident emotion—" My lord, thou dost me and mine infinite honour," cried he. " The wench is a good wench, and I love her, and I only desire to match her with some true knight and honest. An he bring but a good name, and a trusty sword, he shall not lack the wherewithal to keep his horse and his harness in order. But, my lord, she is yet a mere child."

" She thinks not so, sir knight," replied De Lacy, " nor do those that gaze upon her count her less than woman, or love her less. But it is a foible, a fond weakness in parents, to regard their offspring as younger than they are. They grow so imperceptibly,

imperceptibly, from infancy to youth—from youth to manhood, that they are still looked upon as children; nay, I have heard a bearded knight, who hath won his spurs, called ‘my boy;’ and a wench, old and willing enough to be the hen of a tolerable brood, appelled ‘my girl.’ Trust mine eyes, De Travers, Myriol is a woman, a beautiful woman too, and some summers have passed, I ween, since even she deemed herself a child.”

“ Is the wench so forward ?”

“ Not so. There are younger that esteem themselves old enough for wives. Thy daughter only, though surpassing others, seems yet ignorant of her power; and this diffidence and retiring modesty renders her more rare and valued in men’s eyes, in whose hearts she lives.”

“ Then, by St. Mildred, my lord, methinks the sooner the wench be wooed, and won, and wedded, the better,” said sir Reginald. “ A court is a dangerous place for a virtuous woman, even though

a young and virtuous queen presides there, and watches over the honour of her ladies."

"Even so, I think, sir knight," replied the baron; "and the chief object of this meeting is thy fair daughter's welfare."

"Indeed."

"Ay, in truth; and, moreover, I have come hither to propose an alliance, which, I flatter myself, will meet thy approbation."

"What, hath the sly undutiful little rogue dared to fall in love without asking my leave?"

"Nay, I said not so. But a knight (of equal birth and fortune at least) hath dared to fall in love with her, without asking thy permission."

"Of good family is he?"

"What think'st thou of the De Lacs?" said the baron, with a proud, smiling air of confidence.

"Thine, my lord."

"Ay—

“ Ay—doth it like thee ?”

“ Right well—there is none more noble in the king’s domain.”

A “ Then thou wilt accept my alliance ?”

“ Joyfully !” replied sir Reginald, taking his offered hand : “ but,” added he, “ have I not heard that sir William is betrothed to the queen’s favourite, the black-eyed Avis ?”

“ What then ?”

“ Then is he not for my daughter.”

“ Nor shall he be,” replied De Lacy, quickly. “ What think’st thou of the father ?”

“ Thee ?” cried sir Reginald, in undisguised astonishment.

“ I—Hubert de Lacy !”

“ Sure thou art pleased to joke, my lord !” said the old knight, regarding the old baron with an incredulous smile.

“ Nay, by Heaven !” cried De Lacy, somewhat warmly, if not angrily, “ I am neither pleased nor joking, sir Reginald de Travers. In good earnest, and in good

part, I offer my hand and purse. It is at thy option to accept or decline the honour of my alliance."

"Mistake not my surprise for any disregard of thee, my lord baron," replied sir Reginald; "nothing can be more flattering to my pride than the alliance of such a brave and noble knight; but, methinks, girls—girls, my lord, are not always so prone to regard a man's merits so much as his youth. I willingly, proudly, accept thine offer; but I am the person whose happiness is least concerned in this affair, and therefore should be least considered. The wench may weigh thy disparity of years against thy worth, my lord, and—"

"Art thou not her father?"

"Truly—and love her too as a father should, my lord. I will command her, and she obey as willingly, in every thing reasonable and just; but I will not shew my love, by rendering her miserable for life. If she consent to crown thy wishes and mine, I am willing; but, on the other hand,

hand, my lord, I would rather see her happy in her own way, than rich, by gratifying my vanity and thy inclination. These are my sentiments, my lord, blunt and ungarnished, and if therein I have uttered aught that may give offence, I pray thee rather place it to the account of my abundant affection for Myriol, and my solicitude for her welfare and happiness, than breathed in any disrespect to thee. God wot, my lord ! I would readily give my benediction, an' the wench were willing. But old soldiers, like thee and I, my lord, stand little chance of catching ladies smiles, where there are so many young gallants in our way."

" Umph ! true, true, sir knight," replied the baron, hemming and endeavouring to gulp the chagrin which the old knight's observation caused in him. " But there are none among those sparks that are more capable, or more willing to render thy lovely daughter happy, than De Lacy. With our years, experience grows—the

passions, the temper of man, becomes more agreeable and tranquil ; he is of course more likely to bestow happiness, and per-adventure what he obtains in wisdom, may be found to overbalance what he hath lost in youthfulness ; although I flatter myself, sir Reginald, we are neither of us past our prime. Nay, could we ever poise a lance, or wield a brand with more vigour—or rein a steed with more grace and ability, than now ? However, I'll urge my pretensions and hopes no further. Give me but thy consent to woo thy daughter, and leave the winning of her heart to me. What say'st thou ?”

“ That thou art a braver and a bolder knight than even fame speaks thee !” replied sir Reginald, jocularly—“ Right well dost thou deserve the prize, my lord, adventuring so much. Go, and if thou can't win the wench's affection, I'll not be a cruel father. An she like thee for a companion as well as I do, she'll not hesitate long. To her—to her, my lord ; and

and here," filling a bumper, "here's success to the emprise!"

After a few more preliminaries were proposed, and agreed upon by the hearty old knight, who with all his deference to the great and noble De Lacy, could not help throwing out his undisguised sentiments concerning the suitor's age, and chuckling at his temerity in venturing to propose himself to his young and beautiful daughter—and notwithstanding he had given his consent to such a flattering but unequal alliance, he was resolved neither to counsel Myriol to accept the baron, nor enforce his wishes by any stress of parental authority—and although this determination, which he candidly expressed to De Lacy, did not exactly chime in with that nobleman's ardent desire, who would fain have had some gentle compulsion used, he nevertheless quitted the knight, elated with the vain hope of overcoming all Myriol's scruples, and the more so, as the object of her affection, and

his dreaded rival, was not only removed, and his return hopeless, but his fame, by his treacherous conduct, covered with obloquy.

But with all his boasted skill and penetration in reading men's hearts, he knew little of woman's, or held them very despicable in his estimation, to imagine that Myriol's affections could be won so readily by his eloquence, and transferred from a young and handsome knight, to a specious old courtier.

CHAPTER V.
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WHEN De Lacy reflected upon the little encouragement his suit had actually received from sir Reginald de Travers, and that his fate entirely depended upon the caprice, as he was pleased to regard it, of the beauteous Myriol, his heart almost failed him, even upon the first step of his daring enterprise. But inspired as his breast was with the most ardent and passionate desire of calling Myriol his own, he resolved to advance boldly to the attack, and plead his cause with all the warmth and eloquence the cause demanded.

He remembered what he had been—how irresistible—how winning were his addresses in his youth, and time had flown on so rapidly and so unmarked,

that he still esteemed himself not so very much transformed by the approaches of age, or the wrinkles traced by care upon his once handsome countenance. There was another circumstance, which in the blindness of his passion he had not foreseen or contemplated. He began to think that the proposed alliance would not be quite agreeable to the interested feelings of his son—a truth which struck him so forcibly, that he could not but wonder that it had never before occurred to him; vexatiously reserving itself, as it were, only to rise up in opposition to his wishes, at the very moment when he was on the point of determining his fate by one bold effort.

He was staggered by the reflection that sir William might with justice oppose his inclination; that by turning a deaf ear to his interests, his son might, in order to avenge his injuries and slighted fortune, rebel against him, and divulge such villainies, as would inevitably annihilate him and

and his dear-bought honours; he began to fear that those sordid and interested principles which had cost him so much pains to instil into his youthful mind, would now be brought in array against him.

These unwelcome thoughts conspired to render him miserable, and cost him many hours of painful pondering; but to yield up the object of his passion, from motives of fear, and opposition from his own son, was not to be endured.

However, notwithstanding the dread he entertained of sir William's repugnance to his proceedings, he ultimately resolved not to impart his designs to him, till he had won the fair Myriol to lend a favourable ear to his proposals; then, in the event of a rejection (which it would have been despair to have anticipated), every thing might still remain in the same order in which they now stood.

On the other hand, if he were happily accepted (which hope flattered him might be the case), he would make such arrangements,

ments, and dispose of his worldly wealth in such a manner, that it could not be otherwise than agreeable to sir William. In fine, he cared not what sacrifices he made, provided he attained his object, so madly and inconsiderately was he devoted to the fascinating Myriol — perhaps too there was a spice of malignity in the pursuit, for in the prospect of possessing her, his revenge upon sir Roland only appeared to be complete.

Having arranged every matter in his mind, he proceeded, with a nervousness that he could not control, to unfold his purpose to Myriol.

She, contrary to his expectation, appeared neither amazed nor startled by his declaration, for she knew the man, and had long been aware of his foolish passion. On the other hand, her reception was too coldly polite — her demeanour too formal, to be construed into any thing flattering to his suit. He had indeed only gained

a private

a private audience, as the bearer of intelligence from her father.

When he had concluded his exordium, watching her beautiful but stern countenance, as he proceeded to relate his errand and her father's sanction, she replied to him, in a firm decisive tone, which he could scarcely imagine one so gentle and retiring could have assumed—"I have listened to thee, my lord, with patience, because thou hast sought me in the name of my dear father, whom, I am well assured, would never doom his daughter to such an unequal match, in the accepting whereof I should be as culpable as your lordship is ridiculous in the proposal."

"Ridiculous!" repeated De Lacy, biting his lips, while the blood crimsoned his angry countenance; but recovering himself, he added—"wherefore culpable, lady? is not obedience to thine honoured sire laudable? — the knight desires my alliance——"

"And yet the knight's daughter may not,"

not," replied Myriol, boldly; " nor will I remain longer to——"

" Hold!" cried he, using a little gentle force in detaining her; " hear me, even if thou art resolved to spurn me, and be deaf to the language of one who lives but for thy happiness. Oh, Myriol, it was not always thus—I have erst heard more sweet, more soothing accents, from those lips—those eyes, that now send forth such cruel, angry glances, were wont to regard me with the gentle pleasing welcome of an esteemed and valued friend; how comes this sudden change? what error in my life hath deserved this bitter punishment—an infliction worse than death itself? Tell me wherein I may amend, and how I shall regain that proud favour, which I was unconscious of having lost till now? Speak, sweet, gentle lady, and let thy speech gladden the heart that adores thee."

" Indeed, my lord, I do assure thee I  
can

can experience no other feeling than astonishment at this strange language."

"Thy father sanctions it. Will De Travers's duteous daughter thwart her sire's views, and by her proud and perverse conduct, render both him and De Lacy miserable?"

"Miserable—mine honoured father miserable! no, no, my lord," said Myriol; "thou dost mistake him most egregiously to imagine my refusal of thy suit would cause him a moment's pain. I know my father better, and he loves me better than to render me inevitably miserable by such an alliance. Art thou so assured of his consent? go, fetch him hither; and if he command me, knowingly against my inclination, to bestow my hand, I will obey him—I will sacrifice my will, my happiness, to his; but such a supposition doth equally offend against my reason and his affection."

"Art thou then so firmly resolved not to listen to my entreaties?"

"Nay,

“ Nay, my lord, have I not listened—ay, and replied too, and with such patience that my father’s name alone had power to command. I have heard thy pleasure, and thou mine answer—so farewell !”

“ Stay !”

“ What more ?”

“ Oh, much,” replied De Lacy, in an agony of passion, “ and yet too much I’ve heard already for my peace — say, hast thou no pity, and am I hopeless ? Must I despair of ever winning thy smiles ? Oh, bid me hope, even if that hope be distant !”

“ Never, my lord, will my heart’s consent be given—I will not make a confidant of him I cannot make my friend.”

“ Perverse, obdurate, unfeeling girl ! But I will to thy father—his paternal authority may bend thy stubbornness—nay, thou hast assured me that thou wilt obey him—on that alone rests my hope of success. Proud and scornful as thou art, maiden,

maiden, thy father (more worldly wise) regards the alliance of De Lacy as an honour!"

"In sooth then is he not worldly wise therein," replied Myriol, "for methinks the world would not esteem an alliance with thee so very honourable—at this juncture too, my lord. Thou dost forget thou stand'st accused!"

"Accused!" cried De Lacy, while a contemptuous smile curled his lip. "Accused! by whom? a braggart! a traitor! a dastard who hath fled for very shame, incapable of proving what he hath so daringly advanced."

"Methought baron De Lacy knew sir Roland?" said Myriol, her indignation kindling at his sneering manner, and the undeserved odium cast upon her lover's name.

"Too well I know him, and would fain forget him, as 'twere better, lady, thou should'st do!"

"When he proves as unworthy of being

ing remembered as De Lacy," replied the offended Myriol; " but braggart as thou art pleased to call him, my lord, he would scorn to calumniate any knight in his absence. Traitor if he were, he was the king's defender, and the king's pride, and well ye wot he did deserve the laurels and the favour that he won ; and that, dastard as thou dost appell him, may yet appear to thy confusion. The time is not yet run out that doth acquit thee. Thy passion, my lord, doth work strangely upon thee, to make thee so forget thyself and me too, who yet in truth am happier in being forgotten than remembered."

The baron turned pale with inward emotion; his love was almost overwhelmed by his rage, in being taunted in this caustic and unsparing manner by this ingenuous and offended demoiselle.

" Ye saints of heaven !" exclaimed he, " this is too much for mortal man to bear. To hear the praises of a base-born knave  
rung

rung in one's ears by such a virtuous but misguided maid, is galling. Hath this sir Roland witched thee too, lady? But no wonder that one so unsuspecting should be duped by his speciousness, when we that better know the world and men, have been deceived by his smiling duplicity and cunning."

"Would that this world were filled with no worse men than he!" said Myriol.

"What blind infatuation!" cried the baron. "How grieved would thy noble father be to hear thee laud so loundly a banished—outlawed villain!"

"A brave—an injured knight," retorted Myriol, "and I dread not his reproof in saying so; but herein, as in all else, thou knowest my sentiments, my lord, and so fare thee well." And she instantly left the baron to the enjoyment of the no very agreeable reflections which her resolute conduct had occasioned. She had completely baffled all his arguments, and confounded

confounded him by her just replies and warm defence of her lover.

He had expected a more implicit obedience to the will of her father, whom nevertheless he cursed in his heart for his doting, and the ample power wherewith he vested her, and expected little from his intercession. Upon reflection, however, he blamed his own impetuosity, in preferring his suit so much before the period limited by the king for the re-appearance of sir Roland had elapsed, and he resolved to defer the prosecution of his amour, if nothing material should occur, till some time after the completion of sir Roland's ruin; and then, when time and absence had somewhat obliterated the tenderness of Myriol, and moderated her grief for her true knight's loss, he would again throw himself at her feet, and implore her commiseration; meanwhile proposing to lay before her father the dishonourable passion she evidently entertained for a base, insinuating outlaw; and so work upon

upon his honest feelings by his flagrant misrepresentations, that he should inevitably become a party in compelling his beauteous daughter to this detestable union.

CHAPTER VI.  
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“ St. Denis preserve us!” exclaimed the fair queen Matilda, as Myriol approached her, “ what hath blanched thy cheeks, *ma petite*? thou’rt paler than a primrose.”

“ Don’t be alarmed, madame, I pray thee.”

“ Alarmed! nay, by this fair light, there be fear enough in thy visage, Myriol, to pluck the roses from a score cheeks; what makes this terror?”

“ I shall blush to own it,” said Myriol.

“ Then own it quickly, that thou may’st blush,” replied Matilda, “ and look thyself again.”

“ Then, in verity, madame, I’ve been frightened by mine own courage.”

“ Frightened by thine own courage, wench!” cried the queen, laughing; “ why this

this is a riddle—a paradox! how did thy courage lead thee into such alarm?"

"By leading me into a controversy, a wordy encounter with a sturdy baron, madame," said Myriol, "who had the audacity to tell me he loved me, forsooth, and demanded my maiden hand. I wished that it were a knight's, that I might bestow it on him in good earnest for his insolence!"

"Of whom speak'st thou?"

"Even of the baron De Lacy."

"He? impossible!"

"Possible, madame, and certain too, as mine eyes and ears did witness, to my infinite wonder and admiration."

"He did not dare insult thee?"

"Insult! oh, no, madame; he offered me the honour of his name, his title, and his fortune; and I am well assured he held the same as well worthy a maiden's consideration. He sought me under favour of my father's name, whom (strange

to say !) he vouches gives him free license for wooing me."

"Indeed!" said Matilda; "and what said'st thou to thy father's will?"

"That what he wills, I will not, being rather willing to die a happy maid, than be made a miserable bride; and too sure I am, madame, that his true affection will uphold me in these sentiments, and in nowise account me undutiful in rejecting such a suitor, whom, in reason, I may avow can never render me happy."

"This is a most strange fit!" said Matilda, ruminating.

"Do I err, madame, in this resolve?"

"No, no, no, Myriol, thou'rt right, child; I meant not thee, but the baron. De Lacy is sadly changed of late. I will report this to the king. At all events, however hot his passion may be, his declaration is premature and ill-timed; there is yet a mystery to be developed, and the time of his probation is not passed. The days that justice and grace hath awarded

sir

sir Roland have not yet run out—that knight may return."

"Pray Heaven he may!" said Myriol, fervently, "and refute the calumnies of this bold and daring man. I did make the same objection to his unmannered haste, and straight his choler rose, and he railed hotly against the absent knight without restraint, or deference to my presence, dubbing him with every evil name of traitor, dastard, and the like, that I would fain see bandied back again, even in the teeth of the slanderer."

"How long did he hold thee?"

"Longer than I held my patience, madame, for I was incensed at his effrontery; but when I had expended all my little courage in a few warm words, I felt it ebbing—and I fled, my heart beating quicker than my steps beat the ground."

"Poor little heart!" said Matilda, embracing her; "I charge thee, venture not forth from thy chamber out of my presence; and 'twould be as well, perhaps,

not to disclose this circumstance to Avis; it may cause disquiet 'twixt her and sir William, for it would indeed be strange that the knight should accord in his father's views of giving him such a step-mother."

Notwithstanding this reasonable surmise of the queen, however, De Lacy (fearing, from the bold conduct of Myriol, and her just indignation, that the tale of his unsuccessful suit might get abroad) had taken the precaution to seek sir William on the instant, and impart to him his design, glossing it over with his usual policy and cunning.—“ My dear son,” began he, seriously, after he had seated the knight in his boudoir, and commanded his secrecy and attention, “ the chief aim of my life, thou wilt readily allow, hath been the aggrandizement of thy fortunes. I have walked before thee in the wilderness of the world, and thrown down every obstacle that presented itself to oppose thee in thy career. I have smoothed the way,

way, and thou hast marched lightly and gaily forward, and art now in the enjoyment of all that ambition may desire. My fortune is ample, 'tis true; but I am now about to advise with thee upon the increase thereof, which may speedily be effected."

"In what manner?"

"Without hazard. The royal favour I enjoy hath rendered me an object for the speculation of the ambitious. Among those that have made the most flattering and advantageous overtures, sir Reginald de Travers stands the foremost."

"Ay! and what would he purchase?" eagerly demanded sir William. "Of all men, I should have regarded him as the least likely to make any such advances. What is't he desires?"

"*Our* alliance!"

"Ha!" exclaimed sir William. "What, his daughter—his only daughter too? I have pondered on this before," said the selfish and interested knight; "but situated,

involved as I am with the queen's favourite, Avis, it is impracticable; the loss would ultimately be greater than the gain. Is sir Reginald aware of this bar? It is a great temptation, yet it were not wise to cast aside this——Pshaw! it is impossible!"

" After the maturest deliberation," continued De Lacy, " and turning over in my mind some plan to cancel thy engagements, it suddenly occurred to me, that as sir Reginald only required this union for the honour of our alliance, this might as well be effected by *me* as by my son; and wishing not to thrust aside the favours wherewith fortune presented me, I proffered myself!"

" Indeed! indeed!" cried sir William, surprised at this unexpected and unwelcome confession: " didst thou offer to espouse her?"

" Ay, boy! was't not well done?" demanded De Lacy, with a self-satisfied air of his own superior tactics: " and think not

not in this I had any prospect of pleasing myself, but rather sought thy advantage than my own gratification."

"Did the knight assent to this proposal then?"

"Ay, cheerfully."

"Then, by Heaven, my lord!" replied sir William, warmly, "I have not penetration enough to discover how such an union will benefit my fortunes—I rather think they are marred thereby."

"How so?—ungrateful!" exclaimed De Lacy, in pretended dudgeon at his murmuring; "what mean ye? Is this the coin wherewith I am to be rewarded for all my care—my solicitude on thy account? Thou shalt not be a *noble* poorer for this. All that I now possess shall be thine—all! My castles, my lands, my feoffs—all shall be thine! I will not even draw the wherewithal from my coffers to disburse the nuptial presents and festivities. Myriol's fortune is noble—princely; shall I not possess it? Ay, and look ye,

sir Doubtful, the one-half of what she brings will be enough to make a rich widow—the other may be at thy disposal! See'st thou no advantage therein? or art thou blind to thine own interests?"

"Pardon me, my dear lord," said sir William, brightening at the fair light his father threw upon this marriage, in order to win his acquiescence. "I am convinced of thy unshaken love; but the very mention of a step-mother (a young one too!) is enough to make any man (being a son) tremble with apprehension. I fear not however in the consequences that may ensue—it is both reasonable and politic: but, my lord, hath this affair been broken to the damsel's ear?—Is she an obedient daughter?—I apprehend—"

"Nothing—nothing," interrupted De Lacy; "her father and I will arrange the preliminaries: she must needs obey. I will so entangle and embroil him in my interests, that he must perforce take part with me in pressing my suit. Time—time

time will work much in my favour; at present, I must allow the wench appears rather averse to the proposition; in fact, she entertains (as I have long suspected) a penchant for that upstart knight, sir Roland."

"I am assured of it!"

"Ah! poor love-sick girl!" cried De Lacy. "Absence, sir William, absence will soon work a cure of this malady; she will speedily be pleased to cast off this unworthy passion, when she despairs of again beholding the object of it. These childish fantasies wear out in the growth of a month or two, and if she only learn to obey, love will soon follow obedience as a matter of course. Meanwhile, I shall rely upon thy co-operation and assistance, to bring the happy fruits of my industrious perseverance and unwinking policy to maturity. By the agency of her companion, Avis, thou may'st convey such hints and observations to the ears of Myriol, as may serve to ingratiate me in her

favour, which I flatter myself I once enjoyed in the highest degree, and only lost it in taking part against sir Roland, the memory of whom will, I trust, be speedily obliterated from the minds of all, or, if remembered, only as one deserving contumely and oblivion. I have already gained the father's consent—Myriol's alone remains to be won ; at present, hope hath little prospect, but perseverance may do much. At all events, having unbosomed myself, I will now rest in silence till the agitated feelings of sir Roland's partisans be tranquillized, when I will again press forward, and the prize must inevitably yield to my persuasion, and her father's positive commands, whom meanwhile I will have a care to bend and school to my purpose."

“ My lord, I humbly crave thy pardon for my offence, in venturing for a moment to doubt thy ability and worth,” said sir William ; “ and if the strictest diligence and perseverance on my part may in some

some measure compensate for the injury
my thoughtless suspicions have done thee,
thou may'st place the most unbounded
confidence in my exertions, and find me
a most exact observer of thy commands."

" 'Tis well—I'm satisfied," replied De Lacy, in a condescending tone of forgiveness: " now to thy task, and it were wondrous strange that ere the lapse of another month, we have not reaped the harvest of our toil—the meed of our policy. Farewell; I'll to sir Reginald straight—thou to Avis."

Nothing could exceed the pleasure of the baron, at the adroit manner in which he had succeeded in bringing over sir William to countenance his alliance with Myriol; and notwithstanding the obvious disgust with which that indignant lady had received his declaration, and indeed repulsed him, he considered the principal obstacles removed, and a fair field open for the prosecution of his designs; relying

confidently on the authority of the knight, to enforce what his own merits could not win by her favour.

CHAPTER VII.
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THE most persevering and diligent inquiries of sir Roland's friends were of no avail; not the least trace of the knight's route could be discovered; and Ralphe's heart began to fail, under repeated disappointment and fruitless exertion. They scoured the country round in every direction, and left no place unexplored, where it was possible concealment might be afforded; but vain proved every search, and more hopeless became the prospect every day, for his enemies had taken every possible precaution that cunning or treachery could devise to elude discovery.

A few days now only remained of the time granted for sir Roland's re-appearance, and Ralphe and his little force were returning to the city, in utter despair of ever

ever again beholding their brave and honoured master. It was noontide; they had halted to recruit their strength, and refresh themselves in a shady and sequestered spot, some dozen miles west of London.

Their jaded cattle were turned loose to graze upon the rich herbage which offered them a delightful banquet, and their riders a noble carpet and couch, whereon they cast themselves, opening their sumpter wallets, and displaying abundance of wine, fruits, bread, onions, cheese, and dried meats, upon which they immediately commenced an earnest attack, with the exception of Ralphe, who lacked both appetite and spirits, being too much engrossed by the disagreeable reflections upon his lord's inexplicable disappearance. His suspicions were by no means unjust, but he had no proof to bring them home to the parties; and his grief was profound at the irreparable misfortune which had deprived him of his patron.

No one seemed inclined to interrupt his gloomy meditations ; they all sympathized with him, although none could possibly judge what he experienced ; yet few could remember the lively, gay, and witty Ralphe, and now look upon the change a few days had made in him, without reflecting how severe must be the blow that could so suddenly depress such bounding and joyous spirits.

The unbroken silence of this taciturn company however was interrupted by an exclamation from one of the party, which had the effect of arousing Ralphe from his reverie.

“ ’Fore George, an here be not that witless vagabond the Black Boy !” cried the vassal, laughing.

“ Ey—what ? the Black Boy—where ?” exclaimed Ralphe, turning round, and beholding the object of his inquiry, who was striding rapidly towards them.—“ Wel-come, Gervase—welcoime !” said he, leaping upon his feet, and advancing to meet him,

him.—“ Where—where hast thou been hid ? Thy friends have required thine aid, and thou hast been absent.”

“ My heart was with them !” replied Gervase, shortly.

“ Nay, but we sorely lacked thy hawk-eyed vigilance and thy greyhound swiftness to have marked and pursued our enemies,” replied Ralphe ; “ for oh ! Gervase, we are overwhelmed with trouble !”

“ I know it—I know it,” replied the Black Boy. “ The sunshine hath fled from thine eyes, that were full of joy and mirth, and sparkled like the smiles of my fair mistress on the curling waters ! There is grief upon ye—I know it—I know it,” repeated he.

“ What know’st thou ?” demanded Ralphe ; “ the cause ?”

“ Yea—the cause,” replied Gervase. “ The kind shepherd is torn from his flock, and the sheep seek him.”

“ What say’st thou ?”

“ The young knight is carried away !”

“ A wizard !

“A wizard!—a wizard!” cried several of the vassals, who had huddled round him from motives of curiosity, and were mightily astonished that he should know the cause of their complaint.

“Some one hath told thee this—some friend who mourns him?” said Ralphe.

“No,” replied the Black Boy; “I learned this from the youth’s own lips!”

“Heavens and earth!” exclaimed Ralphe, trembling with anxiety, “what say’st thou? Gervase, as thou lovest that knight, speak quickly and plainly. His life—his fame—his honour, depend upon our immediate exertions.—Speak, I charge thee!” said the squire, taking him persuasively by the arm, and looking imploringly in his dark and dingy face.

“Love him!” replied the Black Boy, “better than my life. I have spoken with him; I know the den where he lies hid—I have marked it in my brain—I see it now before me—even in my eye!”

“Speak on.”

“ ’Tis

“ ‘Tis now some nights since,” continued Gervase, “ I was wandering far from the walls of the city among the woods, when I beheld a troop winding slowly among the tall trees. They moved in silence. I climbed an oak, and lay stretched along the gnarled branch that overhung their passage; I could have touched them as they rode under me, but they saw me not; the shades of night cloaked me, and I was secure. Lo! as I looked upon them, I saw the young knight, mounted on a steed, led by two of the band, for his mighty arms were bound by strong chords behind him. I heard him sigh, and my heart swelled high within me; I trembled like the leaves of the tree in the night wind! When they had passed on, I dropped from the tree, and followed in their footsteps till they halted. I watched them; they tied their horses to the trees, and cast themselves on the green-sward in their cloaks; two only guarded the knight, who lay beside them. Their naked

naked glaives gleamed in their hands. They sat on either side of him ; I crept closer to them. This knife," exhibiting Myriol's gift, " was clutched in my right hand ; I longed to leap upon them, and dispatch them, that I might cut the cords that bound the noblest and bravest knight that ever wielded glaive or staff. But I feared to mar all by my eagerness, and watched till I believed all were lost in sleep. The guards whispered no more, and soon dropped their heavy heads upon their breasts. I saw the knight cautiously raise himself up, struggle with the ropes that bound him hand and foot, but in vain. He slowly stretched himself at length again in despair— ”

“ And thou did'st aid him ? ” eagerly interrupted Ralphe.

“ I did. I crept—I crawled—I slid towards him—I hung over him. He turned his eyes upwards to my face ; I put my finger on his lips, and the next moment my knife cut the cords ! He was free ! ”

“ Bravo ! ”

“ Bravo! bravo!” shouted the vassals, who had listened to the Black Boy’s narration with the most wrapt attention.

“ And where is he?” demanded Ralphe.

“ In the hands of his enemies!”

“ How?”

“ He had no sooner got upon his legs, and we were some yards distant from his guards, than they awoke; and missing their prisoner, yelped like hungry hounds, and their cries roused their comrades, who were quickly upon us. We made to the thickest part of the wood; but they observed us. The knight got tangled, and stumbled; at the same time a random bolt from their bows struck me upon the head, and made me reel. I leaped among a cover of underwood. My eyes closed on the darkness around me; every thing was lost to me—I was stunned. I wot not how long I lay there; but the singing and twittering of the birds awoke me, and I saw it was dawn. The past was all vanished from my memory, till I wandered near the

spot

spot where the knight's enemies had slept, and there I found part of the cords that had bound him, and I cast myself on the greensward, and cursed the fate that had put him again into their hands."

"And did'st thou not mark any of the marauders?" asked Ralphe; "did'st thou not recognize any of them?"

"None; but I found the traces of their march—it was plain as the slimy path of a snail, for the trees and the shrubs were broken wherever they moved; and I ran like a brach upon the scent, and lo! before the sun sunk below the hills, I saw them again moving before me; and the knight was in the midst of them. I kept aloof till the shadows of night were about them, and then drew nearer. But they never rested till they came to a large castle, the gates whereof were thrown open at their command, and I saw them close again upon the cavalcade."

"And where is this castle?—To whom doth it pertain?" inquired Ralphe.

"I know

“ I know not; but I marked it well, and will lead ye thither: but there are not enough here for the undertaking!” said Gervase, looking round upon Ralphe’s small, but select band.

“ We will raise twenty times the number in as many hours!” replied Ralphe, cheered by the intelligence, and the clue the Black Boy had given him. “ But,” added he, “ how many days is’t since this occurred?”

“ A long, long while,” replied Gervase, shaking his head, and sighing. “ When I fled to the woods again, hot, burning pains shot through my head, for the bolt of the enemy had stricken me sorely; my parched tongue clove to my mouth, for I had not slaked my burning thirst for many hours. I sought the brook, and rushed into the cooling stream like a hunted hart; I drank deep—my head grew giddy, and I reeled to a close covert, where I laid me down and slept, but my couch was like a furnace of fire. I know not

not how long I remained there—it was a year of pain. I did not forget the youth in bondage, but when my limbs would again bear me on, I sought, and here I've found my friends."

"And for thy zeal, honest Gervase," said Ralphe, embracing him, "receive our cordial thanks, and aught else thou may'st demand at our hands, in reward of these happy tidings."

"Let me see the youth free, and I shall be happy," replied the Black Boy: "Let Gervase's hand strike off his fetters, and joy will be in his heart again."

"Heaven grant thou may'st have that satisfaction!" fervently exclaimed the squire. "Meanwhile, dearest friends, let us do our duty; time is now more precious than the king's gold. Remember that our dear injured lord is in chains, and every moment we lose is a reproach to our fealty. Let some half dozen of ye take our best horses, and summon up sir Roland's friends and forces, and follow us without

without delay: and here, Gervase, our friend and guide, choose thee a steed, my noble fellow, and lead us on to the rescue. Would that I had wings, that I could fly swifter than the falcon! My heart is so full of anxiety, and hope, and joy, I scarce know what I say, or do. Mount! mount! I pray ye, comrades; gird on your glaives, and forward."

They were not tardy in obeying this command; they stowed and packed their wallets with alacrity; and Gervase having selected a fine horse, he vaulted into the saddle, and reined up beside Ralphe, who galloped off gaily, at the head of his little troop.

For several hours they proceeded on their way without halting, so unwilling were sir Roland's faithful followers that he should suffer a single hour's confinement by their neglect; and they would very probably never have rested till they arrived at the castle, where their lord was so unjustly incarcerated, had not their weary

weary and jaded steeds warned them, by their continual limping and stumbling, that they were utterly incapable of proceeding, without resting or baiting for some short while.

Ralphe hereupon reluctantly gave orders to halt and dismount; but so restless was he to be upon his journey, that he could not join in the frugal repast of his comrades, or participate in the few hours slumber their fatigue required; but during this time he walked up and down, examined his arms, or those of his comrades, and conversed with Gervase, who appeared more than ordinarily clear and connected in his converse; the knight's misfortunes wholly engrossing his mind and conversation; and this humour, so congenial to the honest squire's feelings, rendered the Black Boy a most interesting companion.

Ralphe had a thousand little particular questions to ask about his master—*minutiæ* which to those not so interested in the

fortunes of sir Roland would have appeared trifling; but the slightest circumstance —a look—a word—a gesture, were so many things worth the inquiry of such an affectionate adherent as the squire; and a few long and weary hours were scarcely passed, when he again commanded them to remount and follow.

CHAPTER VIII.  
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IT was on the day previous to that on which the fate of sir Roland was to be decided (when all the estates and worldly effects his gracious and grateful prince had bestowed on him were to become forfeited to his wicked and invidious oppressor, De Lacy, who trembled with anxiety for the completion of his revenge, in the utter destruction of his brave and worthy rival), that Matilda and Myriol were promenading arm in arm upon a fair and noble terrace, which led to, and commanded a view of the small but beautiful gardens of the Tower Royal. The suspicious disappearance of sir Roland, and the inevitable consequences of his absence, engrossed their thoughts and speech. Great as was the grief of Matilda, however, she

sedulously concealed the expression of it, and essayed, by the power of her gentle eloquence, to sooth the bitterness of Myriol's, who gratefully replied to all her exhortations to calm her fears, and put her trust in Heaven.

“ Yea, madame, it is therein alone I've trust or hope. Justice on earth is hoodwinked by the malicy of man's wickedness ! Ah, little knows the baron what sadness he hath sown in this heart by his deeds ; for I hold all this his sole misdoing—the which hath been the undoing of my happiness. What benefit shall arise thereout to repay him, or compensate for the ill it hath inflicted ? None—what he gaineth shall be his loss. I would sooner wed death than him ! his very sight is baneful to me ! I read deceit and duplicity in every smile, and look, and courteous word, and detest him for assuming that which he hath not ! I would rather wed the veriest rogue that walks unhang'd !—that bears ‘ villain’ written

in

in legible character on his audacious front, than this designing, smooth-tongued knave, that walks in a mask of smiles, and would fain be held of all men the most honourable and virtuous ! Oh ! would that my tongue could find words sharp enough to tell him how much I do abhor him ! " and she burst into a flood of tears.

" Nay, come, come, *ma petite*," cried the queen, soothingly, " I must not have thee take't to heart so woefully. Thy lover is not condemned ; the knight may yet come forth and prove himself. There remains still another day, and a single hour may suffice to save his honour, and rescue his fair fame from calumny."

" True, true, there *is* another, and *but* another day," said Myriol, mournfully. " Oh that the days were years !—at least so my fears prompt me to desire—although in grief and sorrow a single day's an age, yet would I rather suffer an age of pain than he whom my heart owns should suffer shame ! "

“ The king is just,” said Matilda.

“ Pardon me, madame, an I murmur at his grace’s decree,” interrupted Myriol. “ I know him just, and kind, and honourable ; but had I been king, methinks I would have been less just, and more merciful. A great man’s name is impugned and implicated, ’tis true, but can even that great man’s most partial friends esteem him a better than sir Roland ? And what’s the offence for which the knight’s fame suffers ? None proved ; nor are his accusations attempted to be disproved. His grace, I know, is grateful, and ’tis pity he should allow the malignity of a rival to suppress those feelings that plead so strongly for sir Roland in his heart !”

“ Believe me, his grace is deeply moved by these sad occurrences,” said Matilda—“ indeed is he ; and well I wot his heart is full of these strange circumstances.”

“ Did your grace declare to him the hateful advances of De Lacy ?” asked Myriol.

“ In truth did I !”

“ And

“ And how did his grace receive it, pray thee, madame? Marked he not something in it mysterious—somewhat that would justify the suspicion that he regarded sir Roland as his rival in my affections, and by removing him, had foolishly, yet wickedly, hoped to remove a bar to his disgusting pretensions ?”

“ In no such light as this did he regard it,” replied the queen; “ on the contrary, he smiled.”

“ Smiled !”

“ Ay, as if I had recounted to him some strange conceit, and cried, slapping his hands together—‘ By God’s birth, the old baron hath a young heart and stout; and I marvel not an he carries the wench !’

“ Said he so ?” cried Myriol, looking sorrowfully in the queen’s face. “ Then alack I have no hope in his favour, madame, and my heart will fairly break asunder with the fullness of woe, an’ my good father,

and thee, sweet madame, uphold me not by your love and kindness."

"That will I, I promise thee, sweet one!" replied Matilda, pressing her to her bosom, and sympathizing in her sorrow. "Thou shalt live next my heart, and I will love and cherish thee even as a sister!"

"These tears, madame, are poor thanks, but in sooth they are all my sad heart hath left to bestow," said Myriol.

At this juncture the heavy tread of an armed man approaching, made them suspend their conversation; and looking round, they beheld that redoubtable Fleming, Gerrit Oosterwyk, advancing in a quick step.

"What weighty business bringeth this burly Fleming hither?" cried the queen. "In truth a heavy-heeled Mercury, with ponderous iron *prycks* in lieu of *talonnières**! The lusty carl rolls like a tun, or one of his own broad, round-sterned vessels

* *Prycks*, ancient spurs, with one point, or prick.—*Talonnières*, the *wings* at the *heels* of *Mercury*.

vessels in a stormy sea ! Now, by mine honour, could I laugh outright, were it not for my dignity ! But he draweth near, and I read in his broad face and his compressed lips, that he is big with some tidings !”

Gerrit Oosterwyk approached with as gallant an air as education and nature would permit him to assume ; and having saluted *en militaire*—“ Your queen’s krace ant laty,” said he, “ dare is te paron te Lazy, ant te nople knight zir Reginald te Dravers, vould mit you speak a vort, zaving your krace’s bleasure.”

“ My father and the baron !” cried Myriol—“ my love and hate most strangely coupled ! Pray Heaven this bode no ill ! yet there cannot be aught of good therein, for truly methinks the very air is tainted with his breath.”

“ How shall I answer ?” demanded Matilda.

“ As your grace wills,” replied Myriol. “ It matters little whether I learn the im-

port of this conjunction now or hereafter. An it be evil, it were better burst upon me at once, than hold me in suspense ; an it be good, it cannot arrive too quickly."

" Soldier," said Matilda, addressing Oosterwyk, who stood firm, stiff, and mute, the very prototype of a *Dutch Achilles*, " bid the baron and the knight hither. It is our pleasure to give them audience."

The Fleming saluted, wheeled, and marched off to deliver the response; and in a minute after the baron de Lacy and sir Reginald de Travers were marching towards the ladies, arm-in-arm, apparently conversing jovially together.

The queen received them with all due solemnity, softened by that peculiar grace and affability which she considered due to men of such celebrity and worth, and such staunch friends and able supporters of Stephen's interests and power.

The baron paid his compliments to Matilda, while the bluff old knight saluted his beautiful daughter with a hearty smack.

—“ Why

—“ Why thou’rt pale, wench,” said sir Reginald.—“ What ails thee? Art not ill—art thou ?”

“ No, dear father, not ill, only a slight indisposition—a mere trifle,” replied Myriol.

“ Ah ! ah ! umph !” muttered the knight, looking knowingly at his daughter, and shaking his head. “ I’ve heard—I’ve heard thou’rt in love, girl ! And how darest thou fall in love without asking my permission, ey ?” Myriol blushed deeply. “ Come, come, I’ve guessed thine indisposition I see ; thy burning cheeks tell the tale.”

“ Trust me, dear father, I blush not for my love,” said Myriol, “ nor shalt thou ever have cause to blush for me.”

“ And I will be her gage for that,” added Matilda.

“ And I too, sir knight,” said De Lacy, “ if I may be so bold as to play the champion unasked and unsolicited ; although I would fain be bound to be so, an she were so inclined to favour me, with your grace’s

kind permission, and her father's friendly wishes, who seconds my desire with his paternal behests."

Again the blood forsook fair Myriol's cheeks.

"Sir baron," said the queen, "I freely yield up all my influence to her own wishes; so much I love her, that in aught wherein she may find happiness, I shall sympathize."

"My heartfelt thanks to your grace for this kind condescension," said De Lacy.

"And what sayst thou, wench?" asked De Travers. "Wilt thou willingly accept this noble baron for thy lord and master?"

"Father," replied the maiden, firmly, "I will willingly obey thy commands."

"Commands!" cried the old knight; "tush, tush, girl! did I ever command thee? No, never. Thou wast always a good girl, and needed no authority of mine to bid thee do right; and shall I now command thee to do that which is for

for thee and not for me to judge? The case stands thus: this noble and illustrious baron hath offered his alliance—and I say to thee, Myriol, wilt thou take him—and will it please thee to espouse him? I can command thy affections no more than thou canst thyself—so speak what thou thinkest."

"And think too, fair lady, ere thou speakest," said the baron, imploringly; "remember that the fate of one, whose very soul is devoted to thee, hangs upon thy decree; and let not thy speech, which nature only intended for the utterance of gentle honey words, breathe a wasting blight upon my budding hopes. If I be vain or ambitious, scorn not, but pity me, for being deluded by thy smiles, and won to love by thy virtue and excellence. Speak not hastily then, or in anger, lady; and reflect that her grace, and thine honoured father (thy two best and most valued friends), do both approve my suit, which only

only lacks thy final approbation—one single happy word—to render me blessed."

"Baron de Lacy," replied Myriol, resolutely, "I never—never will be thine!"

De Lacy bowed; but his pale, quivering lips betrayed his emotion.

Sir Reginald de Travers looked grave, and offered no comment, for he very wisely concluded that there must exist somewhat more than the inequality of years, on the side of the courteous, affable and accomplished baron, to justify such an unqualified expression of unconquerable disgust, and resolute denial, from his amiable and beloved daughter.

The queen, forewarned of her favourite's sentiments, exhibited no surprise; but perceiving that the courage which had inspired her to express her resolution so boldly, had deserted her, and evaporated even with her speech, she considerately led her away, to prevent any farther importunities.

Being left alone with the baron, sir Reginald,

ginald, after a few preliminary hems, ventured to break the silence, with the following consolatory speech—"Egad! sir baron, but that's a pozer, hem! Rather too bold! But she's a chip of the old block, sir baron; and I've always enjoined the wench to speak her mind plainly and honestly; I hate mincing the matter. Truth's truth, all the world over, come in what shape it will; and the plainer the better. For my part, baron, I think thou wast right in imagining that she is already enamoured of some swain—some young gallant, I warrant. Well, well, we can't blame her; we've had our day; and thou would'st not wed the wench against her inclination, I take it, for matrimony's a bitter draught, when it lacks love to sweeten it! Come, come, thou art not the man to be cast down by a single blow. Thou may'st run a course yet with any he in the lists of love, and bear away the ring!"

“Sir Reginald de Travers, dost thou
love

love thy daughter?" demanded the baron, in a hurried, vehement tone, and certainly quite unconscious of all the sympathizing knight had been saying.

"Love her!" replied the knight, smiling, as if he would intimate how little occasion there was for such a question.

"Yes, yes, I know thou dost," continued De Lacy, impatiently; "then, sir knight, will not thy fears, nay, perchance thine anger, be aroused, when I inform thee, that I have discovered the unworthy object of her affection—my worthless rival in her heart?"

"Who is it?"

"Wilt thou give credence to it?—even the recreant sir Roland!—the base-born, lowly sir Roland! and she loves him, even in his disgrace."

"Does she?" cried sir Reginald; "then damme an I like her not the better for it."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, truly so, sir baron; I admire her choice. Nay, did not the king love the youth—

youth—was he not beloved by every honest heart that knew him? and can'st thou blame the wench for loving him whom all the world admired? He was thine intimate; and I have heard thee, and thy son too, laud him to the skies!"

"Alack! sir Reginald, 'tis true; but we were all grievously deceived."

"And wilt thou not allow a young maiden to be deceived too, when so many wise heads were thrown on the wrong scent? Truly, I may say, I loved the knight myself, and am as sorry for his mischances and misconduct as thou may'st be."

"It were well, however, sir knight, that thy daughter should pluck his unworthy image from her heart, and not cherish in secret a passion which all the world must now condemn, and which, too evidently, is the only obstacle in the way of my wishes, and her own interest and aggrandizement. Methinks, sir Reginald, thou would'st be rendering both the

the lady and myself a most essential service, by urging thine authority more strongly in this affair. This blind partiality on thy part only adds fuel to the unfortunate flame she entertains. She is too young, too uninitiated, to be left to the unrestricted guidance of her own inclination; and what ye now esteem a kindness may hereafter bring forth the bitter fruit of repentance to both. I do not mean to assert she is unworthy of the confidence you repose in her; at the same time, I fear her total ignorance of the world and its delusions may induce her to place too much reliance upon unsubstantial shadows."

"I thank thee, my lord, for thy care of my concerns," replied sir Reginald; "but I see more cause than ever to trust my daughter's happiness in her own hands —on this important point I am resolved never to influence her. For the honour intended me, my lord, I thank thee, but it may not be."

"Then,

“ Then, sir Reginald de Travers, am I to understand you decline the honour of De Lacy’s alliance?” said the baron, proudly.

“ Not I, my lord,” replied sir Reginald, rather offended by his bearing, and the evident change in his manner, “ but my daughter—undoubtedly—unchangeably !”

“ And thou wilt not command her obedience ?”

“ Nay, by St. George will I not !”

“ Well, well—mighty well, sir knight !” cried the offended baron, with a fierce indignant air; “ but thou shalt learn, sir knight, that no one puts an insult upon De Lacy with impunity !”

“ Insult !” repeated De Travers, scornfully smiling at his vexatious construction—“ But I understand thee, sir baron, and I thank thee for shewing this unruly spirit, for it cures me of all regret I might otherwise have felt in losing thy alliance. Sir Reginald de Travers, sir baron, will be always found ready to do his

his duty!" and turning upon his heels, he abruptly left the baron to his meditations.

CHAPTER IX.
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“FORTUNE, I thank thee! thou hast done thy worst—thou canst not sink me lower. As some wrecked mariner, tossed in uncertainty on the raging billows of the ruthless deep, and thence cast on some desert isle to perish, here I lie, forlorn and hopeless—not a sail in sight. Oh, in what confused and hurried haste the parti-coloured incidents of the past rush through my half-bewildered brain! How free and unencumbered, careless and gay, was the obscure estate wherein I first drew breath! Yet, no—I will not murmur at my exaltation; for my soul was ambitious—I panted for fame—and I won it—ay, and reached even above the fancied height my ardent mind depicted; but 'twas only a trick of Fortune, thus rapidly to raise me up,

up, that I might feel my degradation more. Oh, how blessed and happy is that mediocrity which attracteth not the eye of the envious!"

Such was the exclamatory soliloquy wherewith the captive sir Roland filled the spacious cell he occupied, which, although unadorned by tapestry or other ornament, was by no means a despicable place; clean rushes were strewed upon the stone floor, and a palliasse of straw was a tolerable substitute for a couch. A rudely-chiselled block served him for a bench, beside which stood one of larger dimensions, forming a table, whereon stood a pitcher of wine, some dried fruits, and a loaf of bread; and from a small niche in the wall gleamed a lamp, which threw sufficient light to illuminate every part of the knight's prison-chamber.

He rose from his seat, and pacing up and down, lapsed into a thoughtful silence of several minutes; a heavy sigh heaved his overburthened bosom, and again

again he gave vent to his meditations.—
“ And now are my heartless enemies feasted to surfeit on my mangled fame, and glutting their envious and unmerited hatred upon the calumnious rumours of my recreant delinquency ; but there are those that know me (and this is some comfort in my hopeless state) that will not credit all my foes assert. But, alas ! their commiseration will avail me little in this world—their orisons may serve me in a better ! I know mine enemy too well—the impress of De Lacy’s ruthless hate is stamped upon this vile deed. His over-grown power feared to be shaken by the voice of truth, and his actions were unable to sustain the unwinking scrutiny of justice ; and so these ills I suffer are for his well-doing. How often thus deformed Vice exalts his spotted form upon the fallen victim of his villainy !—But, oh, rigid and unyielding Fate, bend for once thy stubborn neck, and listen to the prayer of an unfortunate ! I implore ye, while

while stripping the hard-earned laurels from my brow, do not blight—do not wither the tender, budding flowers of love, that erst bloomed in the gentle bosom of the peerless Myriol. Let me still live fresh in her memory, and as honoured as when the blustering herald Fame proclaimed my deeds, and shallow smiling friends were mine. I crave no greater boon—no sweeter dirge, than a sigh from her heart when she learns I am no more."

The clanking of the falling chain which secured the door of his prison, and the sudden appearance of the jailer, surprised sir Roland, and broke unharmoniously upon his meditations.

"What, is the night so old, or hath morning already risen, that I behold ye here, fellow?" said sir Roland. "If it be so, by the mass! time hath grown young again, and more nimble in his gait than he were wont to be."

The jailer made no answer, but taking the lamp from the niche, proceeded with his

his drawn sword to examine every corner of the prison.

“ What seek ye, sirrah ?” demanded the knight ; and as he finished his round—“ Are ye satisfied ?” said he.

“ Umph !” replied he, with an unmanly grunt, eyeing sir Roland with a suspicious scowl. “ By St. Jaques ! now I had noises in my head, or was’t thou talking to some one, sir knight ?—I heard speech, that’s certain.”

“ Mine, doubtless,” replied sir Roland ; “ I was speaking.”

“ And to whom ?”

“ Even to myself for lack of better company, or to those stone walls, an thou wilt have it so—the which are not a whit more obdurate than thy heart, thou shag-eared sinner ! and by far more agreeable company, for their greatest impertinence is in repeating my words, whereas thou hast always wherewithal of thine own, which any honest man would blush to own.”

“ I serve my master, and only do his bidding,” replied the jailer.

“ Then dost thou serve Satan, thou reprobate, and put thy soul in jeopardy by doing thy master’s bidding, who bids fair to lead his follower to perdition !”

“ Umph !” said he doggedly. “ Ye mistake me an ye think me such an arrant fool as to thrust away the pitcher that’s put to my lips.”

“ Interest, not love, then sways thy sordid soul,” said sir Roland ; “ an it be so, turn honest, bear, and cheat the devil and thy master at one stroke. Talk of pitchers—why look ye, sir Gruff, thou shalt have enough malvoisie, or clary, or canary, to drown a score such burly rogues as thyself in, and gold enough to case thy capacious carcase. Give me liberty, a horse, and a trusty brand, and if there be justice in the world, many days shall not ’lapse ere I make thee greater, and thy master less than thou art. What say’st, knave, wilt take mine offer ?—thou shalt find

find me no braggart. I would not barter mine honour, or forfeit my word, for king Stephen's wealth. Hark ye me, fellow, I would not sue thy favour, but would buy thy service. Like ye the price?"

" Umph! fair—fair," replied the jailer; " but," continued he, shaking his head doubtfully, " by the lord Harry!—"

" Well sworn, knave!"

" By the lord Harry, methinks I should never taste of thy favours!"

" How?" cried sir Roland, fiercely.

" Not doubting thy word, sir knight," added he, quickly, " but doubting much that I should escape the vengeance of my master, to enjoy thy bounty, else it were a fair—a tolerable fair promise."

" Pshaw! dost thou dread his anger? I will protect thee from all danger."

" Umph! thank thee, sir knight; I will e'en let well alone."

" Then by thy lord—the lord Harry!" exclaimed sir Roland, " who will harry

thee for this, thou hast a greater care for thy body than thy soul. Go to, thou art a base cur-hearted caitiff, that art scarcely worth the rope that will hang thee."

" Umph !" cried the jailer; and turning upon his heels, muttered as he went out —" When the hound is chained, he may bark as loud as it likes him—there's no fear of his biting ;" and closing the ponderous door upon his prisoner (who heard with a sigh the grating bolts and the clattering chain once more replaced), he left him to reflect upon his wavering, irresolute conversation, and sir Roland almost suspected that he might still be moved by his generous offers to lend his aid.

" Irresolution is the parent of a thousand ills, and the offspring of a weak mind, that may ever be moulded to the purpose of the stronger cause. He fears his master—but he likewise places no little value on my offers; and if that master be not near at hand to prop up his failing loyalty, and balance my proffered bait by his authority,

thority, I marvel not if the varlet make it a point of conscience to yield him to the honester party——But pshaw! like all of this world, I am too much given to build my airy speculations on the foundation of my own hopes and wishes; and yet are we often fools enough to murmur at the downfall of these unstable fabrics! I have but one hope—one trust; as a Christian and a true knight, I place my fate and fortunes in the just hands of Providence!" And falling upon his knees, he offered up a silent prayer to heaven.

Having finished his devout orisons, he stretched his weary limbs upon his straw pallet, and sought to lose in balmy sleep the remembrance of his misfortunes.

He had enjoyed a refreshing slumber of several hours, when awaking, he fancied he heard the soft music of some distant voice, singing a slow and solemn strain. He listened; it seemed more like the indistinct sounds fancied in a dream, than

reality : and now it died away, and now grew more audible.

Sir Roland rubbed his eyes, and stared about him ; then starting from his rude couch, he seized the lamp, and ran around the prison walls, as if seeking some aperture whence the sounds proceeded ; but the voice had again ceased, and he stood transfix'd with amazement to the spot, his head half-averted—his eyes fixed, and his lips half-opened—the very prototype of wonder and profound attention. For the space of some minutes he seemed scarcely to breathe ; then impatient of the unbroken silence, he exclaimed—“ Sure this was some illusion of the brain ; it was a dream that vanished in the waking ; for oh ! it was some sweeter, milder voice than I am wont to hear within these uncharitable walls. If it be real, then is it some lorn-lady—a captive peradventure like myself ; and yet what bird ever sang so melodiously, encaged ? More dulcet notes sure never struck upon mine ear—

or

or else it sounds more ravishingly sweet and rare, being heard in this dismal place—as when in some lone and barren spot we see a solitary flower, blooming and gay though in solitude, we prize it more than rarer blossoms growing where others grow, in choice profusion and abundance. Sing on, sweet invisible, and lure me to forgetfulness! Oh, there is a charm in woman's voice, that chaseth away the sorrows of man's heart, and lulls the pain that grief may have inflicted! It was and ever will be thus; for woman was ordained for man's delight and comfort. From the blooming time of youthfulness, when, as his bride and partner, she fills his soul with rapturous joys, and brings foretaste of heaven, to that when bending 'neath the load of years (a venerable nurse!) she hobbles in her gait, and mumbles her consolation in half-intelligible words, to her querulous and ailing charge—oh! even then—in every change—maid, wife, or matron, she proves a blessing!"

Again and again he listened, but in vain ; and after an hour's anxious suspense, he threw himself upon his couch, trusting that he might once more hear the sounds that had fallen so pleasingly upon his ear ; and that discovering from what quarter of his dungeon it proceeded, he might be enabled to communicate his situation, and enjoy the sympathy of a fellow-creature in distress, or learn in whose power he was, although he doubted not that his suspicions of De Lacy did no injury to that crafty nobleman's character.

When the morning came, the jailer appeared, bringing his prisoner's ordinary dole of wine and provisions ; and the knight could not forbear, being urged by curiosity, to put some questions to him that might elucidate the mystery of what he had heard for the first time during his incarceration.—“ Hast thou resolved upon mine offer ? ” demanded he.

“ Resolved,” replied the jailer, “ to do my duty : so, content ye, sir knight, with thy

thy present fare, and thank thy stars thou farest no worse."

"I may in truth thank my stars for putting me in the custody of such a nonpareil as thee; for I am in no fear of thy keeper changing thee for a worse," said sir Roland: "and prithee, most duteous varlet (setting aside thy moroseness), how many captives doth your worship tend?"

"None more than I can keep."

"By St. George, fellow! an thou treatest not thy lady-captives with less rudeness than thou shewest me——"

"How?—lady!—how knowest thou?" cried the jailer, confused. "Hang me, sir knight, an thou speakest not more than thou knowest!"

"And an thou speak'st but what *thou* knowest, dog, assuredly it *will* hang thee."

The jailer uttered one of his usual growls, and stayed not to exchange another word with the knight.

CHAPTER X.
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THE strange incidents of the morning, and his suspicions strengthened by the evident confusion of the old jailer, was full employment for sir Roland's thoughts during the whole of the ensuing day, and he now desired, more than ever, to hear that voice again.

But that night and two successive ones passed, without the accomplishment of his wishes; and he began to despair of ever being cheered by the soft, mellifluous sound of that voice again, when early one morning (as he conjectured, only calculating the time from the regular appearance of the jailer), the self-same voice again broke upon his listening ear; gradually it swelled, louder and louder, although it

was

was very evident there was a considerable distance intervening.

He arose slowly from his recumbent posture, as if he were fearful of startling the unknown songstress by the least noise, and applying his ear closer to the wall, he advanced cautiously along; but the voice became less distinctly audible, the farther he proceeded, and he retraced his footsteps.

Having returned to his couch, he again heard the voice pouring forth some sweet but melancholy strain. Convinced that there must be some aperture near this part of his prison, or a considerable inequality in the thickness of the wall, he counted the moments till the jailer's arrival, that in the security of his absence he might be enabled more minutely to examine the place; and almost immediately upon the departure of his surly and incorruptible guard, he set about his task.

Having removed his straw pallet from the wall, sir Roland, with the assistance of

the newly-trimmed lamp (which was exchanged every morning), proceeded to scrutinize every mark in the rudely-chiselled stone. All appeared in an uniform state with the rest of the dungeon. Upon a closer observation, however, he remarked that the stones in this particular spot were not placed so irregularly as the others about them; horizontally they were the same, but rising about five feet from the floor, there were two perpendicular lines, formed by the interstices of the stones, and running parallel about two feet asunder.

From this circumstance sir Roland naturally concluded that there had formerly existed a passage in this part of the wall, which had been filled up in latter days, to separate it from the adjoining dungeon; and thus the inferior substance of this partition accounted for the audible manner in which the soft notes of the unseen vocalist had met his ear.

“ Yet in truth this must be very slight indeed,

indeed, to allow the passage of a voice even so indistinctly as it doth," said sir Roland, pondering on what he had observed; and placing his hand against the stones, he imagined that they yielded to his pressure. Surprised and delighted, he redoubled his efforts, and the ponderous stone-cased door gave way.

Overwhelmed with astonishment, he stood fixed like a statue to the spot, till recollecting that the jailer might chance to overhear him, and peradventure intrude upon suspicion, and effectually prevent his taking any advantage of his new discovery, he busied himself in the examination of this secret outlet, and perceived that he had, by the merest chance, pressed his right foot upon a loose stone in the floor, which communicated with a spring, wherewith the door was cunningly secured against those who were unacquainted with its admirable contrivance.

Carefully noting every particular, he cautiously closed the door, and having

con-

convinced himself, by repeated trials, that he could open it again at pleasure, he replaced his pallet in its usual situation, resolving to rest quietly till night, when all within the castle should have retired to repose, and he might uninterruptedly explore this secret way.

The voice was heard no more, and he began to reflect that it might probably be only the chaunt of one of the vassal's wives, who was employed in some menial or domestic office in the castle, and that this door would perchance only lead him into some lower region, inhabited by the inferior part of the garrison. At all events, he had little to fear from the issue of his venture, for nothing worse than his present closely-immured and solitary situation could befall him; he therefore resolved to pursue his inquiries, whatever the result of his curiosity might be.

Having spent many hours in a varied reverie of hope and hopelessness, and a retrospective glance of the past, the sun-shiny

shiny view of which only served, in the contrast, to deepen the gloom of his present galling and inglorious captivity, he calculated that the day must have far advanced, and removing his pallet, he touched the spring, and pushed back the heavy door. Taking the precaution to secrete the small knife (wherewith the jailer had supplied him) in his vest, and seizing the lamp, he entered the dark passage before him.

His soul was fearless ; but there was an involuntary, an indescribable tremour pervading his whole frame, which he found it utterly impossible to calm ; and he had not advanced many steps on his uncertain way, when the voice of the songstress suddenly startled him, transfixing him in profound attention to the spot. Sounds, sweet, melodious, and melancholy, were all that he had heard before ; but now every word was distinctly audible. Touchingly expressive was the air, and no less beautiful

beautiful the voice, that warbled the following stanzas:—

“ Ah ! shall I then see them no more,  
Or clasp to this sorrowing heart,  
Those objects beloved I deplore ?  
Or is it for ever we part ?

“ False hope ! to thy visions so fair,  
My heart bids a mournful adieu,  
Thy flattery brings but despair—  
Thy promises prove all untrue !

“ Come death then, and welcome to me !  
Thy frowns bring a balm to my woes ;  
I will hail thy grim presence with glee,  
And calmly sink down to repose.”

A still, unbroken silence succeeded the last dying notes of this lugubrious strain ; and sir Roland, now more strongly urged by curiosity, advanced a few steps, and, by the aid of his lamp, discovered a door, similar in construction to that of his own dungeon (through which he had just passed) ; and, with a noiseless diligence, having succeeded in unclosing it, he ventured to survey the interior of the dungeon, before

fore he made any further progress ; and keeping the door open ajar, with only just sufficient space to allow a view, the first object that met his eye was a lady, seated in a pensive attitude, with her arm resting upon a richly-carved antique oaken table, whereon stood a large highly-finished crucifix of ivory and ebony, upon which her eyes were apparently devoutly fixed.

Her form was symmetrical ; but in the position she sat, her face was not visible, and her long, dark brown hair fell uncurl-ed, partly down her shoulders, and partly over her bosom ; but notwithstanding her desponding lamentation, she appeared to the knight's admiring eyes the very type of hope and resignation, and as if all her trust were placed implicitly in Heaven.

It were impossible to regard her without emotions of sympathy, and whatever the cause of her melancholy or her sufferings might be, sir Roland longed to learn it from her own lips, and offer her his consolation. That she was the victim of in-justice,

justice, as well as himself, he strongly suspected; and the only difficulty that now occurred to his mind, was the manner in which he should introduce himself, without creating unnecessary alarm by his mysterious appearance, the more especially when he reflected that this private entrance was probably unknown to her.

He gently opened wide the door, when before he could utter a single word of friendly warning, even the almost imperceptible noise his cautious movements occasioned, in the still tranquillity of the midnight hour, startled the lady from her thoughtful reverie, and turning suddenly round, she uttered a piercing shriek of terror, on beholding the young knight's tall figure, standing like some supernatural apparition in the open doorway.

“ For Heaven’s sake, madam, hush thy fears !” cried the anxious knight, trembling with apprehension for the consequences of her fearful outcry ; “ bring not thine enemies upon thee. Trust me, gentle lady,

lady, I am one that would rather befriend than harm thee."

"What art thou—human? Yes, yes," cried the agitated dame, "I see thou art. There is a mildness, and a better, worthier nature in those eyes, than have met mine for many long, long miserable years—there is a nobleness in thy mien that bespeaks thee honest, and commands the confidence of the unfortunate—there is something in thee that assures me thou would'st not harm the widowed wife and the childless mother. But hark! footsteps approach! fly, stranger, fly! my cries have alarmed the guard!—away! quick! quick! or thou art lost!"

Sir Roland obeyed, and in a moment vanished from the dungeon.

With palpitating heart he listened without, and heard the clanking of the chains as the door of the prison was unlocked; and the next minute the loud, gruff voice of the jailer filled the place with its inharmonious growl.—"What brawling's this?"

this?" cried he. "By the lord Harry, but methought the roof had tumbled in! What ails thee?—what fear thee?—and what would'st thou?"

"Thine absence, varlet, will please me best."

"Umph!" said the jailer; "then thou didst not want me? An odd vagary, to rouse a man from his natural rest by loud squalls enough to set one's hair on end, and then bid him begone when he comes to proffer his assistance!"

"Thanks for thy promptness," replied the lady, "but I lack not thy care, and I pray thee hold me not capricious—a fearful noise disturbed the dull and solemn silence of this den, and alarmed me. My shrieks were involuntary; but I am now perfectly convinced all my apprehensions were groundless, and I have nothing worse to fear than what I now endure."

"Umph!"

"So now betake thyself to rest again," continued the lady, "an' the sinful minion of

of the depraved De Lacy can enjoy the balmy blessing of repose."

"Umph!" said the surly jailer, muttering, as he walked drowsily away—"a pretty time to be waked up for a sermon! By the lord Harry, but methinks the dame's a priest in petticoats—she's always either preaching or praying!"

CHAPTER XI.  
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No sooner was sir Roland assured of the jailer's departure, than he again appeared to the wondering eyes of the fair captive. She rushed with ardour to welcome him, for his ingenuous air and noble bearing inspired her with confidence, and that hope, to which she had long since bidden adieu, again returned to cheer her drooping heart; for the unfortunate will cling to merest trifles, and look upon the faintest ray that pierceth the gloomy clouds of despair, as the precursor of a glorious sun.

As she approached to meet him, the knight had an opportunity of observing her. She was apparently about forty years of age, but corroding care and poignant sorrow were recorded in melancholy lines

lines upon her once handsome and still fine and expressive features. There was a smile—a sad smile—upon her lips, that were more wont to breathe burning sighs and lamentations, than such welcome greeting wherewith she met sir Roland, while the dewy moisture that hung upon her eyelids, seemed dissipated by the joyous glances of her fair blue eyes, that spoke a still more cordial welcome than her words. Her stature was rather above than below mediocrity—her figure slender but well-proportioned; and in her gait there was a nobility and grace, that bespoke a superior birth and education. Her manners were extremely conciliating; and in her address there was a plaintive, mournful expression, that melted the heart of her sympathizing auditor to compassion.

“ What consolation one unfortunate may offer to another, madam,” said sir Roland, “ thy grief demands, and I will willingly bestow; although I am a prisoner here (entrapped by the arts of some

some treacherous enemy, whose name I dare suspect, but know not of a certainty—)”

“ Know’st thou the rich, the noble, the far-famed Hubert de Lacy?” interrupted the lady.

“ Too well I know him.”

“ Then art thou unfortunate in knowing any thing so vile, so base, so treacherous, as he—art thou surprised?”

“ Not to learn that I am in his power, for I suspected it—nor to hear him so ill-spoken of, for I know the man. I’ve proved him false, to my misfortune,” replied the knight; “ but I was struck to hear thee speak him first so fair and then so black.”

“ I thought thee young, and of the world; and that the world speaking ever of him thus, thou would’st not peradventure have recognized the tyrant, had I exhibited him unmasked, and stripped of all his laurelled fame, shewing him up in all his hateful deformity. But an’ I

may

may rightly judge, by encountering thee here, entombed alive, he is thine enemy too. Thou hast offended him, or crossed the path of his ambition?"

"God wot, madam," replied sir Roland, "I know not wherein I have offended. He did once affect my company and my love; and he and his specious son won my esteem, for I held them fair, valiant, and honest. I little did suspect him capable of guilt like this. But I am too selfish — my sorrows are impertinent — what are my injuries compared to thine? By what misfortune do I find thee immured here? surely thou wast no rival in the career of fame — what motive had he in plucking thee from the world's garden, and burying thee here in such obscurity? May I not learn this? Deem me not idly curious, madam, in this demand. Tell me to whom I now have the misfortune to address myself; for, oh! I am unfortunate in beholding so fair and so

noble a dame in the loathsome limits of this vile dungeon."

"I dare scarce pronounce the name," replied the fair captive; "I blush to own what once was my delight;" and deeply she sighed while the tears filled her eyes as she added—"I am a—De Lacy!"

"Good Heavens! *his* lady!—alas! and false report bespeaks her dead long since."

"Ah! say not so," cried the lady; "he hath broken no plighted vows for me—I never was his wife!"

"Indeed!"

"Thank fortune—no. His elder brother was my choice. A nobler, braver knight, ne'er wielded brand in battle, or ran a course more gracefully than he. He was beloved, admired of all—the very flower of chivalry! Oh! king Henry loved him well, heaped honours thick upon him—bestowed on him unmeasured praise; but alas! his glorious fame (brightly as it shone!) was doomed suddenly to set in death.

death. His merit, and his unparalleled achievements, brought upon him the shafts of the envious, and his insidious brother, (oh! heartless, hateful Hubert!) like a reptile, stung the ingenuous and unsuspecting knight to the heart. Blotting out all memory of brotherhood, or love, or honour, his hot ambition made him thrust aside this insurmountable bar to the attainment of his wishes. He robbed me of my husband, and destroyed my child!" Again the lady, overwhelmed with the grief the recital of her woes renewed, burst into a flood of tears, and her emotion prevented her proceeding.

Sir Roland led her gently to her seat, and sat beside her; and moved by her tears, essayed all in his power to console her.—"Cease, madam, thus to grieve; dry up these bitter tears of woe, and trust in the justice of Heaven for the retribution of thy wrongs upon the head of the offender," said sir Roland. "Anxious as I am to hear (and God wot! willing, were

I able, to avenge) thy wrongs, I will not further press thee now to relate thy manifold grievances ; the recollection of these will only rip open anew those wounds, that time hath partly healed. Compose thyself, madam, I pray thee ; at some future period, not distant, I will listen to the disclosure ; for griefs divulged lighten the heart, and lose half their bitterness."

" Thanks, noble stranger," replied the afflicted dame—" though stranger, my heart cannot truly call thee ; thy generous sympathy in my sorrows already make me regard thee as a friend. My weeping eyes have been so wont to encounter the surly visages of De Lacy's heartless minions for these many—many weary years, that honour, honesty, and benevolence, the which I mark both in thy speech and gentle bearing, are more welcome to my heart, than tongue hath power to tell. Thy gallant presence calls to my mind the noble Richard (lord of my heart!) when in the prime and flower of his age,

his

his valour and prowess had won him the admiration of the brave, and the malevolence and envy of the cowardly and ambitious. Oh ! such was he ! Heart, lie still!—and thou, tormenting memory, show me not the sunny past, to make the present still more lamentably dark !”

“ Yet dark and gloomy as it may be,” said sir Roland, “ hope, and the desire of vengeance, will uphold me. Despair not, madam ; the day may be near at hand, that may bring thine enemies to justice, and I may have cause to bless the hour that De Lacy’s villainy cast me here.”

“ What hope hast thou ? Speak, I will not crush them, be they built on airy nothing, by my cold and sage objections.

“ I have friends,” replied sir Roland ; “ or at least I had, an’ this same viper hath not infected their minds with his insidious poison. The king too loved me well.”

“ Oh ! Henry is a brave man, of gentle manners too, and learned in letters as any

bishop of the land ! Beauclerc may be depended on," said the lady.

"Henry ! Beauclerc !" cried the knight, in amazement. "Good lack ! madam, that worthy potentate is mouldering in his grave long since."

"In sooth, and hath death cut him off ? But alas ! I do forget myself. 'Tis true, I must have been immured in this place years enough to make the young king old : and prithee then, who holds the reins of government now ?"

"King Stephen."

"Ay ? the earl of Blois, and the king's nephew ?"

"The same, good madam, and my noble patron. He made me what I am, or the rather what I was."

"Nay, thank Heaven alone for what thou art," replied the lady. "He gave thee titles, fortune peradventure, as the meed of thy valour, but what king can bestow honour, courage, and virtue ? they can only reward and cherish them.

But

But how unstable are all mundane honours! The hand of a depraved noble (oh! would that kings could give nobility of soul!) hath stripped thee of thy hard-won laurels; but the true and honest heart is still thine, and thou art happier than the despoiler who holds thee captive! But tell me of what family thou comest?"

Sir Roland was not infected with any false pride, but the colour mounted to his cheeks, as he modestly replied—" My name is sir Roland; but though bearing the honourable badge of knighthood, I spring from no rich or noble stock. My father was a vassal, more famed for his deeds than his wealth; for he was of humble birth; in his youth, no less loved by his friends than feared by his foes; and in his old age, a worthy and esteemed veteran, whose greatest pride was to educate me in the noble art of war. He trained me at an early age to all manly and athletic exercises, and inspired my breast, by the relation of his warlike exploits, to

deeds of daring. An accident cast me on the world, and I sought my fortune in the field. Fate was propitious, and I rose, even more rapid than my sanguine hopes dared anticipate. It was my good fortune to rescue my prince from the swords of his enemies, and this accident laid the first stone of my glorious and envied fortunes."

"And did thy father live to see this?"

"Thank Heaven, madam, he did; and it was the better half of my good fortune to see how heartily the good old man rejoiced in my exaltation. He still lives too, and my chiefest fear is, that the hand of the tyrant may seek to deprive him of those comforts which are so necessary at his advanced age. But time flies on, madam, and I must needs quit thee, lest an ill-fated discovery of our communication suddenly overthrow our hopes."

"But tell me, sir Roland, ere thou goest (what my surprise and groundless terror at thy sudden appearance prevented me from inquiring), by what miracle

racle didst thou discover this inlet to my dungeon (which was indeed a secret to me), and by what means thou didst escape from thine own?"

Sir Roland having briefly repeated what we have already minutely related, concerning his accidental discovery of the secret spring, &c. reluctantly bade adieu to the fair captive, and retraced his way to his own dungeon, impatiently looking forward to the approach of the following night, when the unfortunate lady had promised to relate the story of her misfortunes.

CHAPTER XII.  
~~~~~*The Captive's Story.*

THE noble and renowned Osmund, baron De Lacy, had two sons, Richard and Hubert, who were educated and entertained with the most impartial affection by their sire. But notwithstanding their consanguinity, and the mutual esteem which they naturally experienced for each other, there was a vast difference in their dispositions—a difference which, in maturer age, shewed itself more strongly in every word and action. Richard, although no less handsome or accomplished, and indeed still more expert in the use of arms, the *menage*, and all knightly exercises, than his younger brother, lacked all that bland suavity and courteous address wherewith

Hubert

Hubert was gifted in an eminent degree. Richard was brave, but diffident of his merit; while Hubert took every opportunity of insinuating himself into the good opinion of his auditors, by the adroit and well-timed flattery of their foibles, being from very boyhood an adept in reading the minds and passing thoughts of those around him, and always studying, like a politic engineer, how to take advantage of their weak unguarded points.

By thus playing the amiable, and under the semblance of generously yielding his own desires to those of others, he gained the universal good esteem of the vain objects of his flattery.

Meanwhile, the more honest open-hearted Richard, who was too candid to gloss over the faults and follies of his friends, or gain their good opinion at the expence of truth, could boast but a very confined circle; for there are few—very few, who do not like to be confirmed in their self-love by the approbation of others, how

much soever their own reason may convince them how wide from truth are the eulogiums that are passed upon them.

Yet of such is the world composed, with very few exceptions; and Hubert being aware of this failing, took especial care to profit by his knowledge on every occasion. Even the baron (to whom Richard bore a great resemblance in almost every particular) was flattered by the assiduity of Hubert, who evidently soon possessed the greater share of his paternal affection, although the baron ventured not to confess to himself that he made the least distinction in the distribution of his favours.

But he enjoyed this superiority without causing the least feeling of jealousy in the breast of his generous brother, who, on the contrary, entertained for him the sincerest affection, regarding him as his friend, and making him his confidant and counsellor on every occasion where the interference or advice of another was called for.

By almost imperceptible degrees, however, Hubert succeeded in gaining a complete ascendancy over his elder, who almost always yielded to his arguments, though oftener through love than conviction; and their friendship for each other was consequently undiminished. But on arriving at manhood, different pursuits sundered them—a circumstance somewhat grievous to Richard, who really loved his brother, but by no means disagreeable to Hubert, especially as he remained under the paternal roof, and enjoyed every opportunity of ingratiating himself in the favour of his father, unrivalled by the presence of his brother Richard.

About this period too, a circumstance occurred, which tended greatly to further his designs, and at the same time unexpectedly to improve his fortunes. A neighbouring baron, and an old comrade of Osmund's, had an only daughter, the heiress of all his wealth—young, beautiful, and amiable withal, who was politically

cally proposed, and intended by the two friends to unite the families, by a marriage with De Lacy's eldest son.

Richard was then in a distant part of England; but on his return, Osmund, with a smiling countenance, communicated to him the happy and flattering alliance he had sought for him, which only required his acceptance to conclude the amicable treaty.

What was the baron's astonishment, when, in lieu of the joyful acquiescence he anticipated, the young knight, in some confusion, declined the intended honour!

“ And darest thou deny me this?” cried the old man, angrily knitting his brows: “ nay, I have fixed mine heart on this; and lookee, Dickon, it must—it shall be done.”

“ In sooth then, my lord,” replied Richard, as positively, “ it may not—cannot be.”

“ What! wilt thou spurn from thee such a noble fortune—such a handsome wench?

wench? Pshaw, boy! thou'l think better on this to-morrow morn."

"I am no prudish damsel, my lord," replied Richard, "that would say and unsay. I am resolved on this; a night's rest will not alter my resolution. I am sorry my inclination will not allow me to comply with thy commands."

"Dickon! I'll——"

"In aught else but in this, my lord," continued the knight, interrupting him, and fearless of the rage that darted from his sire's eyes, "I will readily obey thee, but in the choice of a wife I must be allowed to be the judge of my own happiness."

"Then 'fore George!" cried the disappointed and exasperated baron, "thou'rt an ill-mannered, headstrong, disobedient son; and I disown—discard thee. Thou'rt a disgrace—a reproach, to the name of De Lacy; and——But, lookee, sir Positive, an thou marry'st not this wench, mind ye that thou dost not take to wife any

any of meaner birth, or less wealthy than she. Let her be equal, and I'll forgive thee. But, oh ! is't not a thousand—thousand pities to cast away—Good lord ! I cannot think on't : leave me, sirrah, or—”

At this juncture Hubert joined them, and the old baron appealed to his good sense and services, to endeavour to bring over his brother to accord with his request; and he was well fitted for the office, having been previously made acquainted with, and not a little jealous of, the enviable fortune that awaited his elder brother.

The incensed baron departed, leaving the headstrong Richard to the management of Hubert, being himself too much heated by the rejection of his proposals, to be enabled to argue rationally against his obstinate resolves.

“ Is it possible, my dear brother,” said the wily Hubert, “ that thou art averse to this alliance?—a party so noble, honourable, and rich, and withal, a lady

sighed

sighed for by a hundred hopeless knights? But I am too well assured of thy judgment and discretion, to suppose that thy refusal ariseth from any other cause than some prior engagement of thy affections."

The glowing colour that suffused the knight's cheeks convinced Hubert that he had touched the right chord, and he therefore continued, with a well-feigned sympathy in his feelings—" For mine own part, Richard, I speak of this, being but too well experienced of the mighty power of love. Shall I confess to thee, brother, that on no one less capable of giving thee counsel in this delicate affair, could our father have delegated his authority; for I must ingenuously disclose to thee, that mine own happiness in this life is too much interested, to allow me to urge thee to yield, where I would fain have thee as stubborn and immovable as a rock."

" How? What mean'st thou? Art thou

thou then my friend?" eagerly demanded Richard.

" Thy friend, Richard!" repeated Hubert, with a look and tone of gentle rebuke. " Can'st thou ask this of one that hath never given thee cause to doubt the sincerity of his affection?"

" Pshaw! brother," replied Richard, moved by this appeal of feigned sentiment, " I meant not so. I doubt not thy love; but methought thine obedience to our father would have made thee take part with him, and combat against my disobedience, with strong arguments and forceful words, the which, Hubert, though coming from lips I love, would fall like headless arrows against the sturdy mail of resolution wherewith I'm harnessed. But explain quickly the import of this unexpected language thou hold'st. Fight not about the bush, but bear on boldly to the point; thou speak'st not to one that will turn an indifferent ear to thy smallest wish."

" Know

“ Know then, Richard, love hath made me play the traitor in this cause.”

“ How so ?”

“ In the necessary negotiations which have passed between our father and his trusty friend,” continued Hubert, “ I have been the chief agent ; and having many opportunities of personal and unrestricted converse with the angelic Bertha (for oh ! Richard, she is a virgin above the praise of mortal tongue !) I conceived (rebel that I am) a most violent passion for her, whom I ought to have regarded as the betrothed of my brother.”

“ Indeed !” cried Richard, both surprised and overjoyed at this confession ; “ then have we cause to thank our stars that have ordained no rivalry betwixt us ; for by mine honour, Hubert, she is thine !”

“ Too generous brother ! how can I ever thank thee enough for yielding so much wealth, so much beauty to my arms !”

“ Nay, by the mass ! Hubert, thou hast little need to laud me for giving thee what

what it likes me not to retain. I should rather thank thee for taking a burthen from my shoulders. So here's mine hand on't, brother, and I wish thee joy of thy conquest."

" Yet must I thank thee, for my heart o'erflows with joy and gratitude," replied the truly delighted Hubert. " But think not, my dear Richard, that if it had pleased thee to have concurred in our honoured father's proposals, that I would ever have disclosed the ardent passion wherewith my heart's inspired. No! I would willingly have sacrificed my happiness to thine, and fled far away from the object of my adoration, whom fate had irrecoverably bestowed on a more favoured relative. But it hath been ordered otherwise, and I trust I shall live to prove how grateful I am for thy goodness."

Having thus given vent to his generous and high-flown sentiments, which were more in sound than genuine feeling, he soon prevailed on his brother to espouse his

his cause, and hint to the baron that the alliance he so much desired might, with little difficulty, be brought about, by proposing him in the place of his brother.

Without mentioning that such was Hubert's desire (which he had craftily forewarned him not to do), Richard, upon their next meeting, bluntly proposed him as a substitute; and finding it in vain to endeavour to prevail upon Richard to espouse the lady, the baron at last consented to make the offer to his friend; and after a private consultation with Hubert (who, like a dutiful son, expressed himself willing to sacrifice every selfish feeling to his father's wishes), he set off to make some new arrangements with the lady's father, who ultimately acquiesced in his views, upon the promise of the baron, that Hubert should have equal share with Richard in his lands and money—a proposition that owed its origin to the insinuations of the *generous and grateful* Hubert, who vowed it was a trifling sacrifice for the honour and

and aggrandizement of the family, which would certainly be affected by this noble alliance.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Captive's Story continued.

IGNORANT of the treacherous part Hubert had played, not only in conspiring to deprive him of part of his patrimony, but in estranging the natural affection of his father, Richard cordially congratulated him upon his marriage with the lady of his heart, little imagining that the ardent passion wherewith his breast was inspired was not love, but avarice; for notwithstanding the lady did possess some personal charms, they were very inferior, in his estimation, to the attractions her immense property held out.

Many months had not elapsed since the consummation of this politic intrigue, when

when Richard's duty suddenly called him abroad.

With a brow heavy with care, and a voice tremulous with emotion, the brave and honest-hearted knight called aside his brother, and imparted to him the cause of his evident uneasiness.—“Hubert,” began he, “I am, as thou knowest, about to depart this kingdom. Many months may run out ere my return, and I therefore would confide to thy care and protection, a treasure, the possession of which I have kept secret even from thee, my friend and brother.”

“Trust me,” replied Hubert, surprised at this preamble, so unusual from the mouth of his brother, “thou may’st repose unbounded confidence in my care, of whatsoever value it may be. What is it—and where lies it?”

“A lady, fair and virtuous.”

“Soh! a lady, brother?”

“Ay, a lady,” replied Richard, “and withal my bride.”

“I am

“ I am astounded! Proceed,” said Hubert.

“ Thou dost remember well, no doubt, the gallant knight, sir Everhard.”

“ I do.”

“ He had a sister.”

“ Lucie?”

“ The same, and thine (by marriage now), and dearly too as if she were by blood entitled to a sister’s claim, I charge thee cherish and maintain her rights in my unseasonable absence. Oh, I would have fain foregone the fame and honour I may reap in this exploit, to have remained here a few months longer; for she promises fair to become a mother, even before thy lady, Hubert, and thou alone canst divine (putting thyself in my predicament) how grievous such a separation must prove to me: yet for my life I dare not linger, lest my father demand the cause of such a strange defection of my duty, which I have ever fulfilled so joyously till now.”

“ I read it all,” replied Hubert; “ I see the true cause (which I then suspected) of thy rejection of my Bertha. Little did I suppose, however, that thou had’st been so rash and unadvised as to espouse one so much beneath thee, in title and fortune too !”

“ Brother,” said Richard, sternly, “ do not presume to pass thy judgment upon my actions, nor by the slightest breathing of contempt to derogate from the virtue and honour of the lady Lucie, whose merits render her, in my estimation, the wealthiest heiress in the land ! And although the fear of my father’s wrath prevents me from proclaiming to the world her titles and her worth, I shall be proud to own her when the time arrives. But if thou hold’st it below thy dignity to countenance thy brother’s wife, because, forsooth, her virtues are her sole inheritance, speak honestly, and I will seek some friend less scrupulous.”

“ Come, come, Richard,” said Hubert, soothingly,

soothingly, fearful of having in his surprise expressed his sentiments, for once, too candidly, “ thou art too hasty ; indeed thou art. No one will subscribe more willingly than I to the lady Lucie’s claim to thy affection. She is indeed incomparable, and well deserves the honours she may share with thee. But thou must allow, brother, after the express injunction of our father, that thou should’st not, under pain of his lasting displeasure, contract marriage with any party that could not boast an equal fortune with the lady Bertha, that my exclamation was natural, for I had not hypocrisy enough to disguise my astonishment at the avowal of this (in respect of fortune) unequal match ! But an’ thou think’st that I entertain any such sordid opinion upon the subject, thou know’st but little of thy brother’s heart ! No, my dear Richard, thou may’st rest perfectly assured that I will regard her with all the esteem thine own affectionate heart would require of me.

For thy sake alone I would do this. She likewise hath a claim upon me, for the friendship the brave but unfortunate sir Everhard bore towards me. I will be her friend and brother."

"Now art thou, in truth, thyself again," said Richard, pacified by his explanation, "and I will entrust thee in good faith, and with a contented heart. To-morrow we will ride out together, when I will lead thee to my lady's bower, and consign her to thy custody. But harkye, Hubert, let not a word of this be breathed, even in thy lady's ear. Put upon thy lips a seal of secresy that no power may break, for on thy tongue hangs my ruin or my future happiness."

"I swear!"

"Hold!" cried Richard, "I do not demand this at thy hands. The word of a true knight is ever his bond, and from *thee*," said he, affectionately—"art thou not my brother, Hubert?"

Reposing the most unbounded confidence

dense in the promises and protestations of Hubert, Richard soon afterwards bid adieu to the fair Lucie, and embarked. But Hubert had no sooner lost sight of the knight than all his solemn vows were forgotten, and he began to meditate some plan whereby he might benefit himself and increase his possessions.

At first he was inclined to disclose the marriage of Richard to the old baron, but fearing perhaps that his indignation at the inequality of the match might soon evaporate, and the natural affection he still bore his brother gain the ascendancy over his exasperated feelings, and incline him to forgiveness, he rejected the idea, and resolved, upon reflection, to keep the secret and his faith, in this particular, towards his too-confiding brother. Meanwhile he paid the lady Lucie all the most delicate attentions her situation demanded, and completely won her esteem and confidence.

His brother's return was already pro-

tracted far beyond the time he had proposed, and the anxiety of Lucie hourly increased; even the hardened heart of Hubert was not wholly insensible to her mental sufferings, and he essayed all his power to sooth her agitated feelings. As yet he had not resolved on any plan; indeed it was impossible, in the present situation of affairs; but under pretence of keeping her more secure from observation, he removed her to his own castle, thereby holding her the more entirely at his mercy and disposal, hereafter to act towards her as his evil genius or his ambition should prompt.

She had not been many days in this dull seclusion, when she gave birth to a son, attended only by one female domestic of Hubert's household, in whose secrecy he could confide, and a monk skilled in leech-craft from a neighbouring monastery, situate on his lands, and of which he was the munificent founder and patron.

Her repeated inquiries after tidings of

her

her beloved Richard, at last wearied out the patience of Hubert; and to set her mind at rest, he came in pretended haste early one morning, and informed the delighted Lucie that the knight had arrived, and was well in health; but that affairs of the most vital importance to the state would prevent him from gratifying his ardent desire of embracing the lady of his heart and his new-born son. Her anxious fears were relieved, and content with this explanation, the lady Lucie rapidly recovered, and amused the long, long hours of solitary confinement in the nursing of her beloved infant.

Even of this pleasure however the cruel Hubert soon deprived her. He informed her that it was the desire of Richard that the infant should be provided with a nurse, fearing that the seclusion, in which necessity obliged her at present to remain, would prove injurious to the health of their offspring. However plausible this unexpected mandate might appear, the lady

was alarmed by its suddenness, and rather surprised at the altered and peremptory manner of Hubert, who cruelly refused to leave her boy to her maternal care only for a few weeks—a few days longer.

Her suspicions were now first aroused, and summoning up her depressed and failing spirits, and all a mother's fond affection to her aid, she boldly expressed her determination not to part with her child, before she received the commands of her husband in person, and surely in a few days he might be enabled to visit her, and in that time her infant's health could not possibly receive any material injury.

Hubert however was not to be denied—he was inexorable—he was deaf to her prayers and entreaties, and unmoved by her tears, vowing that he would not risk his brother's displeasure by acceding to her remonstrances, which were as foolish as her fears were groundless; and he concluded by snatching the infant rudely from her arms, and placing it in the hands of

of two men, who were waiting without ready to receive it.

The agony of her mind was insupportable, and she swooned away ; and when she returned again to the full sense of her misfortune, a burning fever raged through her throbbing veins, rendering her so helpless, that she had not strength enough to raise herself from the couch whereon her ruthless relative had placed her.

The same venerable monk who had before attended her, again appeared, and exerted his skill (and not fruitlessly) in administering to her malady ; but her female attendant was withdrawn, and never from that moment made her appearance. Thenceforward to Nicol Arnot alone (Hubert's servile minion) was entrusted the office of attending and supplying her with the necessaries of life ; and too soon did the unfortunate lady learn the extent of her unparalleled misfortunes—she never beheld her child or husband more !

CHAPTER XIV.
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*The Captive's Story continued.*

IN furtherance of his wicked designs, Hubert had resolved to conceal the lady Lucie, and destroy her unoffending offspring. But heartless as he was, he had not villainy enough to imbrue his hands in the blood of the innocent, and therefore prevailed upon Nicol Arnot, and his comrade William Brisset, for a large reward to undertake the deed. And when his brother Richard returned on the wings of love and expectation to embrace his beloved Lucie and his child, Hubert met him with a countenance full of sorrow, care, and evil-boding.—“Hubert—tell me quickly, brother,” cried he, tremblingly, “and let me not sink under the suspense of this awful

awful silence—"where is my angel wife?"

"In Heaven!" replied Hubert, solemnly, while he trembled no less fearfully than his injured brother; but his was not the tumultuous emotion of a heart o'ercharged with unutterable griefs; he trembled with conscious guilt.

Richard clasped his hands in an agony of despair, and dropping on one knee, he uplifted his tearful eyes (for the hardy warrior wept!), and exclaimed—"Oh, Heaven! whom I have ever truly served, let not thy wrath fall upon the head of one who dares to murmur at thy just decrees—whose heart riven by grief, mourns the loss of her who was its sole delight—without whose presence, and whose endearing smiles, this blooming earth were a bleak and barren blank. Perchance I have sinned in loving her so well—in making her my heart's idol—my heaven on earth! And, oh! if this be the bitter infliction awarded for my crime, God knows I'm punished!"

For a moment he was silent ; his breast heaved as if his heart were struggling within him. Again he arose, and taking Hubert's trembling hand (who was not yet so hardened in villainy as to witness his brother's awful woe unmoved), he demanded if his child had survived.

" Alas ! no : the cherub shared its mother's fate !" replied Hubert.

" Ah me !" sighed Richard—" not one ray of hope left to cheer me ?—not one single tie to bind me to this life ? My wife dead !—our child gone too ! What, not a single bud of that fair rose-tree left to bless my longing eyes, and yield some comfort to my aching heart ? Oh, my beloved Lucie ! would that I were in heaven too ! But thy Richard's heart is broken, and he cannot long survive thee !" and again he covered his face with his hands, and wept bitterly.

Hubert endeavoured to administer some consolation ; but he had inflicted a wound

wound that it was not in the power of his speech to heal.

“Leave me, Hubert,” replied Richard to his exhortations—“I pray thee leave me to the indulgence of my grief; for being so heavy, I would that it were ten times more, that it might burst this throbbing heart at once. Oh, mine is a sorrow that admits no cure! Go preach to ruthless Death—bid him throw wide the marble tomb wherein the treasure lies of which his hand hath robbed me. Bid him give back to life my bonny bride and my little one! Can’st thou do this? No, no. Then breathes there no comfort in thy counsels to mine ear. Nay, Hubert, leave me, I entreat thee—my woful lamentations will infect thee: it is not fit that thou should’st share them. Thou hast a wife, Hubert—a loved and loving wife; she is a mother too! Oh, may lasting joy and happiness be thine! Go—seek and enjoy these precious gifts that

heaven

heaven bestows—and let not my sighs or sorrows intrude upon thy pleasures."

Several days elapsed after this occurrence (wherein the inflexible cruelty of Hubert was so eminently displayed, prompted by his inordinate ambition, unmitigated and unmoved by the awful grief of his generous and too-confiding brother, which would have melted any heart less indurated by an evil course than his), before Richard came again; and when he appeared, deep-rooted sorrow had in that little space of time so worn him down, that he bore more resemblance to the spectre of some departed soul, than the brave and gallant warrior that had but a few passing hours since encountered him with a smiling countenance, high with hope, and love, and expectation. Even Hubert shuddered at the pitiable change.

But Richard no longer gave vent to his grief in words of lamentation—a death-like apathy had succeeded to the first dreadful

dreadful burst of his harrowed feelings ; but there was a still settled mournfulness in his look, that moved the sympathizing heart more eloquently than words, and Hubert at that moment *did* certainly experience a sudden qualm of conscience—a feeling of compunction—that could he have undone the deed, without blasting his own fame by the confession, he would willingly have resigned every benefit he promised himself by a perseverance in his villainy. But it could not be ; and his fears and his selfishness succeeded in silencing the virtuous whisperings of his conscience. He had gone too far to recede, without incurring the penalty of his crimes by an avowal of them ; he was, consequently, compelled to inflict wounds that otherwise he would fain have spared, and still pursue the thorny and dangerous path his reckless ambition had marked out.

Richard had visited and wept over the marble tomb, which the designing Hubert

bert had caused to be reared to the memory of Lucie, whom he had indeed consigned to a living death in the dungeons of his own castle.

The fair prospects of happiness which Richard had anticipated, were thus fatally blasted in the very outset—all his airy castles raised by a fond imagination, destroyed by the ruthless hand of a brother!

With a desponding heart he resolved to bid an eternal adieu to those scenes of early felicity, the contemplation of which now only served continually to renew his sorrow. From the baron he could expect no sympathy in mourning a woman dead, whom if living he would have wished so; for this reason he never imparted the tale of his misfortunes to his father.

“ Brother,” cried Hubert, as the knight approached, “ whence comest thou, and whither hast thou been so long absent, and invisible to those who would willingly have condoled with thee?”

“ No

“ No matter,” said Richard, in a hoarse, lugubrious voice; “ whithersoever I may rove, it boots not—I cannot fly from my griefs—they are even in my heart’s core, and there will they remain, till death relent of robbing, and compensate me, by dislodging them—death brought the evil, and death bears the antidote.”

“ Time may work wonders yet, and make life still desirable,” said Hubert.

“ Never,” said Richard, sighing; then after a moment’s pause, taking his brother affectionately by the hand—“ Hubert,” said he, “ I now bid thee farewell—for ever! I am resolved to quit England, and repairing to France, there enroll myself among the pious brotherhood of some monastery, and indulge my sorrows in the tranquil seclusion of its holy walls. I have already wherewithal to defray the charges of this undertaking. I need no luxuries; and I leave thee, dear Hubert, heir to all my worldly wealth, bequeathing therewith my heartfelt wishes for the prosperity

prosperity of thee and thine; and all I ask for this is now and then a prayer, such as a kind good brother—like thyself—may breathe in purest love for an unhappy one like unto thy Richard; and thou, Hubert, though far, far away, shalt have a place both in my memory and my heart, and be not forgotten in my orisons."

Hubert was confused, and a fearful tremor pervaded his whole frame, as he returned his brother's affectionate embrace; but he could not utter a word in reply to Richard's parting benediction; conscious of his own worthlessness, his "God bless thee, Hubert!" fell like a retributive thunderbolt on his guilty heart.

But Richard's voice or blessing never met his ear again. Six months had not elapsed before tidings of his dissolution were received.

It was many years, however, before his last words ceased to haunt Hubert's imagination; and often in his troubled dreams did that dismal interview present itself in all

all the glowing colours of reality to his mind; and the undeserved—"God bless thee, Hubert!" sound audibly to his startled ear.

By the death of the baron, which took place at no very distant period from the decease of his brother, Hubert found himself on the sudden in the undisputed possession of all that he desired.

A partial gloom was, however, thrown over his successes by the sudden loss of his amiable wife, before his son William had attained his fourth year—an occurrence which had a lamentable effect on the moral character of the young De Lacy, inasmuch as his early education devolving upon Hubert, he naturally imbibed those political and intriguing principles, combined with that outward shew of sincerity and plausible duplicity, from whence sprang his father's guilty greatness.

But these changes caused no relaxation of his severity towards Lucie, his brother's widow, whom he still held in durance

rance in the dungeon where sir Roland chanced so accidentally to discover her; and great was the indignation of the noble youth at the relation of her manifold wrongs. In her sorrows his own were absorbed, and forgetful of his bondage, the generous knight exclaimed—“Madam, I will avenge thee of this monster!”

But again recalled to a sense of his own defenceless situation by the lady Lucie gently warning him of the approach of morning, his brow was tinged with confusion, and taking up his lamp, he hurried hastily from her presence.

CHAPTER XV.  
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LEAVING for awhile sir Roland and the unfortunate lady Lucie to sympathize in each other's misfortunes, and project a thousand impracticable schemes for the recovery of their liberties, we will now, courteous reader, directly progress with the thread of this our eventful history.

On the night preceding the momentous day whereon impended the fate of sir Roland, for the time prescribed for his re-appearance had unfortunately run out, a fearful outcry issued from the chamber of Hubert de Lacy, arousing those who were slumbering in the vicinity, and filling the breasts of those who chanced to be waking at that still, solemn hour, with the most awful sensations of terror.

Sir William, who slept, or rather, kept awake

awake by the anticipation of the morrow, was sitting up, and counting the dull and laggard hours, as they rolled slowly on towards the morning, was dreadfully affrighted by the sudden shriek of horror that pierced the air. For a minute he remained incapable of speech or action ; but he was presently recalled to his senses by the faint cry of—" Help!" in which he recognized his father's voice.

"St. Erkenwald protect us!" exclaimed the knight, and snatching up his lamp, he rushed to the baron's assistance, sword in hand.

At the door of the chamber lay one of the baron's youthful pages, who sleeping in the antichamber, had doubtless been alarmed by his cries, but running to his aid, had fainted with terror on the threshold.

Sir William de Lacy stayed not to raise him, or make idle inquiries, that none might answer, but bursting open the door, he beheld the baron prostrate on

on the floor, with a poignard clutched in his nervous grasp.

He imagined, at the first sight, that he was lifeless; but on his approach, the baron half arose, and resting on his elbow—“My son! ah! lend me thine arm,” cried he, faintly, “place me on my couch.”

As sir William proceeded to obey him, he felt him tremble in every limb, big drops of perspiration coursed down his pallid cheeks, and his restless eyes seemed wandering about in search of some object of his apprehension.

“What dismal fantasy, my lord, hath filled thy soul with such unspeakable terror?” demanded sir William, at the same time administering a cordial for the renovation of the old man’s ordinary firmness and courage.

“William,” cried the baron, somewhat recovered by his presence, and the efficacy of the draught he had swallowed, though his pulse still beat high—“William, Nicol—Nicol Arnot hath been with me!” and he

he looked around him, and shuddered as he whispered his detested name.

“ Impossible!” replied sir William; “ thou dost forget, my lord, that Arnot died long since. Awake, awake, my lord; this is but the delusion of a dream. Was he not cast in a dungeon, and there left to perish? Nay, thou didst hold the key thereof in thine own custody, lest some of his enemies (for none loved him) might be moved to set him free, or give him food.”

“ I did—I did—I hold it now!” said De Lacy; “ I know he is dead too. But yet I saw his iron visage even now, and his dark, villainous eyes, met mine, and glowered vengefully upon me. It was no dream—I am convinced I saw him; my soul shrunk in horror from his gaze. He prophesied my fall, and his ominous speech congealed the life-blood of my heart!”

“ If our condemnation hangs upon a spectre’s tongue, I hold our fortune’s firm as ever,” said sir William, fearlessly, believing

lieving still that his appearance was no more than the phantasm of a troubled dream.

“ True, true; but yet I do forebode no good from this,” said De Lacy, despondingly, “ nor is this, sir William, the first time I have encountered him. Dost thou not remember when, at the breaking up of our midnight revelry in the camp before Arundel Castle, how I was troubled?”

“ Thou wast fearfully moved, I do remember,” said sir William; “ but thou wast silent on the cause.”

“ I saw *him* there!” continued De Lacy; “ his grim visage was but half concealed beneath the cowl of minstrel; but he vanished ere I could utter a word! That was the first warning since his death. For the second time, he again appeared to me in this very chamber, one night, even before I retired to rest. And on this night, a noise awoke me, when I beheld his well-known form gliding before my eyes. I leaped from my couch,

and rushed desperately towards him, armed with this poignard. I madly aimed a blow at the unearthly being, when my uplifted arm was arrested by his mighty grasp, and unnerved by his freezing touch, he cast me (as the northern blast would cast a sere and withered elm-tree) senseless to the ground!"

"Alack!" cried sir William, amazed at this recital, and perfectly convinced that the baron's fears were not entirely chimerical, or without foundation, "the very tale chills me with fear."

"And mark me, sir William, this is the *third* time the apparition hath warned me! It may be the last!"

"May it prove so!" said the knight; "and may it never cross thy path again! but compose thyself, my lord; the coming morrow is pregnant with importance to us; and although secure from opposition, we need muster all our faculties, to meet the fortune that awaits us, with becoming calmness, dignity, and outward charitable-
ness.

ness. Let those that look upon us (the curious, the vulgar, and the envious!) be duped by our bearing, that may seem rather to resist than desire the acquisition, that, by the king's decree, devolves upon us!"

"I will—I will be bold," said De Lacy, "and summon up my fleeting courage to the task; but leave me not till dawn, sir William, for the very shadows of the night, in my imagination, transform themselves to horrid shapes to torture me. Now would I willingly yield up all the advantage of our anticipated gain, to be freed from the future visits of this monster!"

"Rest assured we will contrive a remedy for that," replied sir William; "for less than the moiety of our gains would win a dispensation from his holiness for a blacker crime than this, which in sooth was only the extremity of justice, exercised upon the head of an offending minion! They say, the pope hath power to

cast these evil spirits in the depths of the Red Sea, never more to return to plague mankind with their midnight visitations."

"There is some hope in that!" sighed De Lacy, adding—"What a blessed religion it is that holdeth forth such comfort to the rich and powerful!"

Conversing thus together, and rehearsing the manner of the morrow's farce, wherein they were to sustain the principal characters, they whiled away the weary hours till morning. But theirs were not the only waking eyes within the Tower Royal. None of those who loved sir Roland slept that night. With a fond heart, replete with the most fearful forebodings, Myriol offered up her fervent prayers for her loved and valiant knight's return; and although her vigils were spent in lingering apprehension, the morning beamed too soon; and the busy preparation for the reception of the dreaded assembly, that was to determine her lover's fate, sounded dismally on her startled ear.

She

She had confided to her fond father her sentiments towards that worthy knight, and the old man, far from censuring, applauded her predilection; at the same time, he coincided in the suspicions (which the late conduct of De Lacy had excited) that he was the prime cause of his rival's sudden disappearance, and all the consequent misery and evils that were likely to accrue to him from the baron's villainy.

To substantiate these suspicions, and against so powerful a noble, was hopeless, and the failure of such an attempt would bring utter ruin upon him who dared to be champion of sir Roland's rights. However notwithstanding he was debarred by these fears from openly defending the knight, De Travers resolved to join with the few that still remained true to him, in the endeavour to find some clue to his concealment. But all his exertions proved fruitless, and he gave up the search in despair.

Early on the morning of this eventful

day, sir Reginald de Travers visited his sorrowing daughter, but he had nothing consolatory to communicate ; all hope was entirely extinct. The hour was rapidly approaching when the bitter triumph of De Lacy would be complete.

“ This must be the last day of thy sojourn in this place, Myriol,” said the old warrior, putting his arm around her slender waist, and pressing her to his heart—“ The very sight of this great villain will be grievous to thine eyes. Believe me, he will let slip no opportunity of renewing his disgusting importunities, for he is not the man to be repulsed ; nor will he be in the least abashed, even by the presence of the queen. And I augur, from his silence upon the subject of the bold defiance he gave me so rashly, that he wishes it forgotten, and would fain try his eloquence again in winning thee to his wishes. But I will explain, as far as I dare, to our amiable queen, my reasons for withdrawing thee from her protection,

and

and I am convinced she loves thee too well to take umbrage at the precautionary steps an anxious father takes for the welfare of his daughter."

"Oh, she is all goodness, and will applaud thee, father," replied Myriol; "she knows every secret of my heart, and sympathizes with me in all my affliction. But—ha!—listen!" cried she, turning deadly pale. "Hear ye not the hoarse trumpets summoning the assembly? My heart sickens at the sound; it is the voice of death to me!" and bursting into a flood of tears, she buried her face in her father's bosom.

CHAPTER XVI.
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As all were more or less concerned in the issue of this cause—some from mere curiosity — some from love to the absent knight—and others again swayed by the puissant baron, the different parties composing the assembly were speedily convoked, and awaiting the baron's arrival, and the king's presence, in the most profound silence, only interrupted occasionally by the whisperings of some garrulous old baron, or some deedy knight, expressive of their wishes, their fears, or their hopes.

The clanking or rattling of the mail and weapons of the guard, (stationed in the vestibule of the hall), as they saluted, gave notice of the baron's approach.

A slight murmur of applause from his  
partisans

partisans welcomed him as he cast his penetrating eyes round the assembly. He was supported by sir William, who led him to the same seat he had before occupied, and they entered into a desultory conversation; but it was very evident that that ordinary self-possession which so characterized De Lacy was wanting, and his fine animated countenance, usually flushed, was now pallid from the effect of his midnight terrors.

The irksome stillness and expectancy of the assembly was at last agreeably interrupted, by the presence of the king, who, with a moody and troubled countenance, (slightly recognising the warm expression of his nobles' loyal feelings), took his seat. He put some questions to those standing beside him; the answers to which appeared by no means satisfactory. He arose—" Most noble barons, and right valiant knights," said Stephen, " I am well convinced there be none among ye who do not grieve at the just decree it is our

unhappy fate to denounce against our once honoured and late trusty knight, sir Roland. But he comes not to avert the sword of justice, and it must fall! Say, be there any here that have learnt aught of his fortunes or his fate, or can yield us any clue whereby we may reasonably and charitably judge of the cause of his non-appearance, where, as appellant at this trial, we had an undoubted right to expect him?"

He looked inquiringly around him, but no answer was returned.

"None? none?" said the king, with disappointment; "and where is the squire (a faithful vassal he, I do believe) who did implore so earnestly for a respite—have ye seen him?"

"'Tis not long since, my liege," said De Lacy, "that some of my knaves encountered him and his troop; but he entertained them with such irreverent language, and threatened them for their ~~very~~ lord's sake (so appelling me), that they left

left him to indulge in his own ill-humour and his calumny, fearing that he might (secure in his superior force) put this threat of beating them into execution."

"This was highly reprehensible in sooth," said Stephen, "but we expect not, my lord, that moderation and courtesy from a low-bred knave, that we look for in a noble or a knight. He is vulgar, but honest; and there is some allowance to be made for party feeling. He would not have addressed this language to the knaves' master."

In this conjecture however the king erred, for Ralphe would have as boldly called De Lacy recreant to his teeth as he did behind his back.

"But he had not discovered the knight?" added the king.

"Oh! no, my liege."

"I hope so, or I trust he would have hied him hither," said Stephen. "But the squire knows the day, and doubtless

will be here to answer for himself, or I am mistaken in the man. Bid the heralds fill the air with the voice of their trumpets. The hour is past, and he comes not; but we will yield him every grace we may."

Loud rang the harsh notes of the trumpets resounding through the whole city. Again, and then for the third time, they summoned, in due form, the appellant, at intervals of several minutes; but the unfortunate sir Roland did not appear in answer to the call.

A sigh of bitter disappointment heaved the breast of the king as he arose. In an instant the nobles and knights stood up as it were in one mass—and the clattering and clangor of their armour and accoutrements as they uprose, drowned the first words of the king's address.

" 'Tis done! and we can do no more," said the king. " We have shewn towards the appellant all that gratitude for his former services to myself and to the state, demanded

manded at our hands. It now only remains in thy breast, baron de Lacy, being the aggrieved, to grant a further licence, or leave the knight to condemnation, and his lands and estates to sequestration.—What is thy will?"

" I would have justice, my liege," replied De Lacy, " such as thee, and these my worthy compeers, shall award me. I would not be deemed unmerciful, your grace, but I must uphold that dignity which in me is but the reflection of your grace's glory, honour, and greatness, which, as a true and loyal subject, I am bound to defend, even to the death. But I bow, my liege, to whatsoever thou, in thy judgment, shalt command. I am thy servant, and, I dare add," placing his hand upon his heart, " a faithful servant too."

" True, true," replied the king, somewhat moved by this appeal, " and we do most gratefully acknowledge our obligations to thee and thy brave son; and to shew how much we feel a wrong that's put

put upon thee, we here publicly, in this honourable assembly, proclaim sir Roland—”

“ Sir Roland ! sir Roland ! sir Roland !” was echoed by a hundred tongues, and loud and deafening huzzas reverberated through the spacious hall.

The guards posted at the door gave way to the eager pressure of the crowd without ; and from the tumultuous mass of vassals, guards, and servitors, rushed the noble and injured knight sir Roland, followed by the delighted Ralphe, almost mad with joy, and the swarthy Black Boy.

In a moment the breathless and agitated knight cast himself prostrate at the king's feet, who was struck dumb with mingled pleasure and astonishment at the sudden and unexpected appearance of his favourite. — “ Not guilty ! my liege, not guilty !” cried he, and he could say no more ; he was overcome by the violence of his feelings.

It

It was some time before order or silence could be restored, the commotion was so great.

De Lacy dropped back with speechless horror in his chair, at the first sight of sir Roland, whose friends, accompanied by Ralphe and Gervase, and all his adherents, formed themselves in such a formidable circle about him and sir William, that if they had been disposed to escape, they would have found it utterly impracticable.

“Rise up, sir knight,” said the king, when silence was at last obtained, “and say why should we not pronounce thee unworthy of our favour.”

“Thanks, my liege, for granting me license of speech,” replied sir Roland, recovering his wonted self-possession, “and I doubt not I shall bring such proof of mine innocence, that your grace, and all these nobles here, will willingly pronounce mine honour free from every stain.”

“Say first,” said the king, “what is the cause,

cause, and where hast thou lain concealed so long?"

"Even in the dungeons of yon trembling recreant's castle!" said the knight, pointing to De Lacy.

A dead silence of inexpressible astonishment, followed by expressions of disgust and horror at the baron's baseness, succeeded this bold accusation.

"Look on him, my liege, I pray thee; an' there be not 'guilt' legible in his troubled countenance, acquit him."

"Prove this," said sir William, who was scarcely less moved by fear than his sire.

"Ay, prove this, sir knight—prove this!" added De Lacy, in a hoarse voice, rising and resting on his chair to support his trembling frame. "There must be better proofs than thy assertions."

"Thou shalt have proof enow," replied sir Roland, "to overwhelm and crush the little hopes thy confidence gives rise to. Stand forth!" added he, addressing himself

self to some one in the crowd, for he stood on the steps of the king's throne, and could distinguish almost every person in the hall.

The long, gaunt, meagre figure of Ralphe's uncle, William Brisset, penetrated the crowd.

“ Brisset !” murmured De Lacy, and his eye glanced fire as he frowned upon him ; but the old man was not intimidated.

“ Is this thy witness ?” said sir William.

“ Ay,” replied sir Roland ; “ and wilt thou doubt his veracity ?”

“ Dost thou know aught that may inculpate the baron De Lacy, who stands before thee ?” demanded Stephen.

Not a whisper was heard—all was profound attention.

He was about to give his evidence, when a piercing shriek from De Lacy threw the whole assembly in alarm ; but it was not Brisset that caused this fearful outcry. He staggered forward, and his glaring

glaring eyes were fixed in horror upon the form of a rude and unknown figure, that had glided unperceived from among the crowd, and now stood gazing upon him.

“ Accursed spirit! why dost thou haunt me?” cried he. “ Away, away!” and losing his senses, he fell, deprived of life and motion, to the earth.

“ Speak! what art thou?” demanded Stephen; “ methinks we have seen that face before!”

“ Often! My name is Nicol—Nicol Arnot,” replied the object of the baron’s terror. “ I was once the slave of this ungrateful man, who now thinks me dead. It was my policy to make him believe so, till I had time and opportunity to avenge myself. He is now in my power, and his guilty soul shall quail beneath the lash I have prepared. I have such a tale of villainy to unfold, that even the innocent shall recoil with horror at the recital. I came not here to speak on the part of this young knight,

knight, although by my aid he was liberated ; I have other things to discourse upon. I entertain no love for any mortal living—if I have done good, it was not premeditated—I only seek to avenge myself. But let us revive this fallen sinner ; I would that every word of mine should fall upon his ear, and every syllable drop like molten lead upon his tortured soul."

CHAPTER XVII.  
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By the assistance of sir William, whose fears were somewhat abated by Nicol's confession of his corporeality, the baron was raised from the ground, and replaced in his chair, where he soon recovered from his trance, to the full sense of his unfortunate situation.

"Cheer up, my lord! Courage, or all is lost," whispered sir William. "Nicol Arnot lives!"

"Lives!" cried the baron; "then all the saints be praised—I fear no human power!"

The king, who was unable to divine the cause of these unaccountable movements, was curious to learn, and set his doubts at rest; and perceiving that the baron had recovered the use of his speech,

he

he commanded him to answer the allegations of the witnesses.

De Lacy arose.—“These strange occurrences in sooth demand some explication,” said he; “but ere I commence my exculpation, I would conjure thee, oh just and generous king, and ye, my worthy peers, to regard me as innocent of these charges, till I be proved otherwise, and let not the breath of these conspirators weigh one straw in the balance of justice; I am not guilty, though I stand impeached. This minion, who now beards me with such an unblushing front, was once my varlet. I thought him honest and true, and I honoured him; but in a fit of frenzy, having raised his hand against my life (as I can prove should ye demand it), I did consign the scorpion to a dungeon, and there left him to suffer—a meet death for his baseness and ingratitude! And is the testimony of this doomed slave, whose life is in my hands, to be received against his injured lord?”

Nicol

Nicol Arnot smiled contemptuously at this evasive address.—“ How like a drowning man he struggles !” cried he ; “ but he shall perish, though I sink with him. I come not here for profit or reward, but as the vengeful complice of this base, ungrateful man—to tell the deeds wherein we are concerned, and call upon this tribunal for justice.”

“ Speak on then,” said Stephen, “ and succinctly ; of what dost thou accuse thy lord ?”

“ Firstly, of having concealed his brother Richard’s lawful wife in the dungeons of—”

“ Liar !” exclaimed the half-frantic Hubert, “ she died ! she died !”

“ Then doth she live again ! And behold, she comes to plead her own cause !” said Nicol, adding, with a bitter, sardonic laugh—“ *My* hand did this !”

At the same moment the lady Lucie appeared, richly apparelled, and led in by the queen, and followed by a train of female

male attendants, who entered from a private door behind the king's throne.

The king, who knew nothing of this matter, was all amazement; and when his lovely queen introduced the baroness de Lacy, exclaimed—"By God's birth! and hath our fair consort too conspired against De Lacy?"

"Not so, my liege," replied Matilda, "I only appear as the defender of this injured lady's rights; not to conspire, but to overturn a deep-laid plot!"

"Oh, sad—sad sight!" exclaimed the baron; "lo! what a toil have they cast around me! But I will not fall a victim to their accursed artifices without a struggle!"

"Dost thou not know this woman?" asked Nicol.

"No, villain!" cried he, "I know her not; she is some precious tool of thine, schooled for my destruction. Indeed—indeed ye are all imposed upon by the insidious tales of mine enemies!"

"What

“ What mean’st thou, sir baron?” said sir Roland; “ if thou dost aver this lady be not thy brother’s wife, as her champion, I will cast back the lie thou utterest, even in thy teeth. I discovered her myself in thy dungeons, where thou hadst traitorously cast me, for the which crime alone thou dost deserve to be hurled down from that height thy misdeeds, and not thy merits, have gained, and be stripped of those honours which thy villainy disgraces. This indelible stain upon thine honour thou can’t never hope to obliterate. But for myself (being free), I care not; my grievances shall be elsewhere answered. As the sworn champion of Richard de Lacy’s widow, I do demand the restitution of those rights whereof thou hast deprived her.”

“ Thy speech is fraught with madness; I know her not!” doggedly replied De Lacy.

The baroness De Lacy here conferred with the king, who, taking a parchment from

from her hands, unfolded it, and presenting it to the bishop of Winchester (being himself unable to read), bade him declare its contents.

“ This document is the certificate of the marriage of Richard de Lacy, knight, with the lady Lucie, witnessed by the sign-manual of the reverend abbot of Montalban, who performed the ceremony. This,” said the bishop, “ backed by the testimony of these varlets, is an indisputable evidence of her right to the title she assumes.”

De Lacy pulled a leathern case, clasped, from his vest, and his trembling fingers having unclosed it, he turned pale, and let it drop from his nerveless hands when he discovered that it contained nothing.—“ I have been robbed!” murmured De Lacy.

“ *My* hand did this!” again repeated Nicol Arnot, with a fiend-like expression of his delight at the baron’s consternation; “ I did not haunt thee without a purpose!”

“ De Lacy,” cried the king, sternly, “ these are accumulated proofs of thy baseness that cannot be denied; thou hast sinned grievously, and thou had’st far better yield up thyself to the mercy of thy accusers, than vainly endeavour to excuse these unworthy actions.”

“ Yield!” exclaimed De Lacy, scornfully — “ never; what I have done, my liege, I dare defend, and here publicly demand the trial by combat, in the issue of which Heaven will mark the just.”

“ Oh, Hubert de Lacy!” said the baroness, “ art thou so hardened in villainy, that thou darest call thus wickedly on Heaven to decide what we have indubitably proved, and thine own guilty conscience — ”

“ Woman,” interrupted De Lacy, passionately, “ I have said it—I demand my right.”

“ And I am right willing to answer thy defiance, if my sovereign wills it so,” replied sir Roland.

“ Nay,

“ Nay, by God’s birth !” exclaimed Stephen, warmly, “ I will not risk the life of a brave knight against a proven and attainted malefactor.”

“ A murderer too !” added Nicol Arnot.

“ A murderer ?” said the king.

“ Ay, a murderer,” replied Arnot ; “ for he destroyed his brother’s child—his nephew, and this lady’s son.”

“ Good Heavens !” shrieked the baroness, “ was he not content to rob me of my babe, but he must take away its precious life ?”

“ My hand is guiltless of that deed,” replied De Lacy ; “ there stand his murderers !” pointing to Arnot and William Brisset.

“ Yea, we did the wicked deed,” said Brisset, standing forward, “ won by the lucre of this limb of Satan, and for which my conscience hath ever since upbraided me; but we imbrued not our hands in the blood of the innocent, albeit this

wicked man," pointing to Arnot, " who moved me by his persuasion to the deed, would, in obedience to his lord, have taken away its life."

" What then became of my child ?" demanded the anxious baroness.

" Why, this tender-hearted milksop," replied the ruthless Arnot, " carried it in a wicker basket across the water, and there humanely exposed it on the highway, near unto the earl of Oxford's, to be devoured of wolves, or otherwise perish, as fate might direct."

" Oh, cruelty unparalleled !" exclaimed the baroness ; " but say what more ?"

" More we know not," replied Arnot ; " we never afterwards heard of the bantling."

As he concluded, a venerable old man pushed forward, who was immediately recognised by sir Roland, who exclaimed— " What, mine honoured father ! welcome !"

" Nay, welcome me not, Roland," said the

the old man; “ when I confess how much I am concerned in this iniquitous affair, thou wilt be ashamed to call me father.”

“ Thee, my father, guilty? impossible!” exclaimed the knight.

“ This is most strange!” said the king; “ come forth, and avow wherein thou hast erred, old man.”

The grey-headed veteran approached the baroness, and falling on one knee, he drew from his vest a curious riband of silver tissue, worked with figures of gold, to which was attached a medal of antique form.

The moment this met her eyes—“ Thou art his murderer then!” exclaimed the baroness, turning deadly pale, as she received the token from the warrior’s hand.

“ No, lady, not his murderer, for the child that bore this token lives.”

“ Lives!” cried fifty voices.

“ Ay, and there he stands, in the person of sir Roland!”

“ My mother!”—“ My son!” exclaimed

the baroness and the knight at the same moment, rushing into each other's arms; for their consanguinity was already acknowledged in the irrepressible sentiments of affection that had already sprung up in their hearts.

“Rise, good old man,” said the baroness, “and receive my thanks.”

“And mine too, father,” said the delighted sir Roland; “for father I must still call thee, for thou hast proved a tender and careful one to me.”

“And may I then hope for pardon for having called thee mine own so long?” said the venerable old man; “although I solemnly protest it was not for gain I did conceal it from thee, for I found thee helpless, and I cherished and I loved thee, diligently training thee to martial exercises, foreseeing even in thy boyhood that thou wouldst one day excel in them, and do honour to us both. I had no children of mine own, and the temptation to claim kindred

kindred with thee was therefore the stronger."

"Thine error was the error of love and charitableness, old man," said the king; "and therefore deserves more praise than punishment. Arise, and stay thee with thy *protegé*; thou shalt not lack reward for thy services.—And now, my lords and knights," addressing the assembly, "having witnessed these wondrous vicissitudes, wherein the hand of a just Providence is so evident, it only remains for us now to pronounce judgment upon this heinous offender, who hath, by a life of hypocrisy and unexampled cruelty, disgraced the titles and the honours that he hath so unjustly borne. As a noble of our kingdom—as a true knight, he was bound by his dignity, his oath of allegiance, and his faith, to be the ensample of virtue, to defend us and our laws, and succour the oppressed; whereas he hath directly warred against all these obligations, and

brought shame and contumely on his name. What shall be his doom? Would it not be justice to consign him for the remnant of his miserable days to that same solitary confinement, in which he hath held this virtuous and much-injured dame?"

"Then have I lived too long!" exclaimed De Lacy.

"Ay, truly said," replied Nicol Arnot; and ere his purpose was suspected, he drew a short poignard from his girdle, and stabbed the baron to the heart, "and thus I free thine anguished soul and avenge me."

A general commotion ensued, and the women fainting, were led away from the sanguinary scene by the attendants.

The guards secured Arnot, who resigned himself without a struggle.

"To the torture with him!" cried the king, incensed by his brutality; but the wretch smiled scornfully at his commands.

—“Ay,

—“Ay, to the torture!” repeated he;
“Death is welcome! My soul thirsted
for his blood, and I am avenged!”

CHAPTER XVIII.
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IT now only remains for us to explain the cause of sir Roland's prompt appearance at the assembly, just in time to rescue his fame from the obloquy wherewith the machinations of Hubert de Lacy threatened to overwhelm it.

One night, while discoursing with the baroness de Lacy, they were alarmed by the opening of the prison-door, and the entrance of Nicol Arnot. The lady Lucie instantly recognized her former jailer, and shuddered with apprehension at the danger which the discovery of sir Roland in her dungeon might bring upon him.

But Nicol Arnot appeared no less amazed than the lady. For a moment, neither uttered a word. However, observing that sir Roland grasped a knife, he

he quickly, but silently, closed the door; and speaking in a low voice, he bade them not fear.—“As ye value your own safety, make no noise,” said he. “This lady only knows me as the servile minion of De Lacy; I am no longer his slave. He hath insulted me beyond recall, and I come hither to offer this lady liberty—not for any love I bear her, for I hate all man and womankind, but I only seek vengeance on the head of him who hath spurned me.”

“Dost thou give credence to this tale?” said sir Roland.

“I think it probable,” replied the lady; “at all events, any duplicity on his part will injure us as little as it will avail him.”

While they were conversing, Nicol Arnot remained at a distance.—“If I mistake not, thou’rt sir Roland?”

“The same. Where did’st thou learn my name?”

“From every tongue. Thy flight is the theme of every idle gossip. I know

De

De Lacy, and I suspected this contrivance. Moreover, even at this hour thy squire and a chosen band are encamped before the castle, loudly demanding entrance, and vowing that if thou art not yielded up ere the morrow, they will besiege the place. But they are laughed to scorn ; for their numbers are inadequate to the task their loyalty prompts them to undertake."

" And wilt thou aid us to escape?"

" I will—this very night."

" Swear!"

" As I hope for vengeance, and as I hate the man," said Nicol, with vehemence, " I will free ye from the undeserved captivity in which De Lacy holds ye! Ye may rely on me. I know thou, lady, dost deservedly despise me ; but even thou wilt believe me true, when I affirm, in this affair I only seek to serve myself!"

" Well, I am satisfied. I will confide."

" And

“ And I,” said sir Roland. “ But how are we to avoid the guards?”

“ Even as I came, so may we all depart. For myself, I fear not: an’ I encounter any of the vassals, they will swoon, or fly before me, believing me dead, and that my spirit walks. But I know every crook and outlet of these subterraneous passages too well, not to be able to avoid every interruption; besides, I have secured the jailer,” pointing to his dagger significantly, while his auditors shuddered at the *sang-froid* wherewith he ruthlessly confessed the immolation of a fellow-creature in cold blood; “ and here are his keys! but these we require no more; the handle of my poignard is the key to every secret spring that fastens each door in our route. But let’s away while night covers our retreat.”

“ Can this be true?” said the lady, as she threw a large, dark mantle over her slender form. “ I can scarce believe the evidence of my senses! And shall I breathe

breathe the pure air of heaven again before I die? Shall I again behold that beautiful world, to which my withered heart had long, long since bidden an eternal adieu?"

Nicol Arnot however could not participate in her joyful feelings, and only continued to urge her speedy departure.

Sir Roland, concealing his form in the capacious cloak which Arnot had worn, put the lady's trembling arm in his, and followed their conductor, who was hugging himself in the prospect of an ample and speedy vengeance on De Lacy; and in about a quarter of an hour the joyful captives found themselves without the castle walls.

Sir Roland immediately proposed to join his friends, who were encamped without; and having, by a circuitous path, gained the point, the knight soon made himself known to his faithful squire, who was almost frantic with joy at the sudden apparition of his beloved master; but apprehensive

prehensive that the inmates of the castle might discover the murdered jailer, and pursue them, they retraced their way to London with all possible expedition, and arrived within sight of the city, just as the last trumpet sounded.

Sir Roland put spurs to his steed, and galloped to the hall, where he appeared in due time, as we have seen; while Nicol Arnot, in company with two noble knights, sworn friends of sir Roland, conducted the baroness de Lacy to the queen, and briefly related the injuries she had sustained, and, as we have seen, confronted the baron, who deservedly suffered an ignominious death from the hand of his slave.

Sir William de Lacy, beholding the utter destruction of all his visions of riches and glory, fled unmolested, and joined the partisans of the empress Maude; upon which the duped and too confiding Avis became inconsolable at the loss of her worthless lover, and soon afterwards took

took the veil, in a nunnery in her native France.

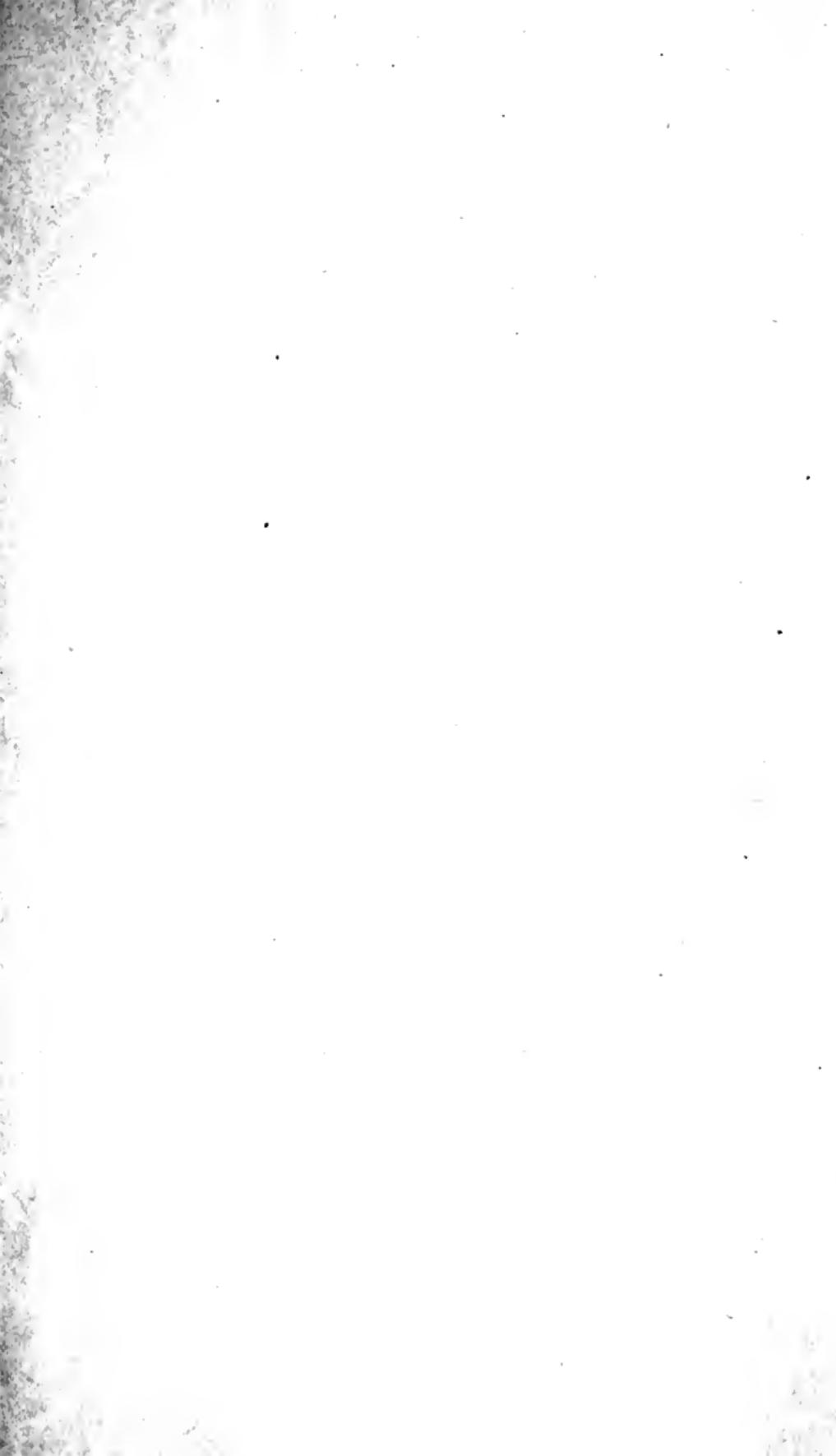
Sir Roland (now baron de Lacy) took possession of his paternal estates, with the newly-acquired title, and enjoyed more favour than ever in the eyes of the grateful Stephen and his amiable consort; and to crown his felicity, the tender and affectionate Myriol surrendered her liberty, and blessed the arms of her true and trusty knight; while Ralphe, by the intercession of his master, obtained the honourable badge of knighthood at the king's hands, and distinguished himself on many occasions in the royal cause.

As for the Black Boy, he considered himself sufficiently rewarded, in beholding the happiness of the brave young knight, and his favourite, the "meek-eyed dove!"

THE END.







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